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Nick Carter Stories

THE FATEFUL HOUR

or, Nick Carter's Number Plate Clue

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THE FATEFUL HOUR;

Or, NICK CARTER'S NUMBER-PLATE CLEW.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER I.

BOLTS FROM THE BLUE.

It was, as Nick Carter afterward said of it, one of the most audacious, craftily planned, and boldly executed robberies that he had ever witnessed, a veritable masterpiece of knavish engineering and criminal daring.

Not often, as a matter of fact, has it happened that Nick Carter was on the scene of a crime when it was committed. His duties usually took him there after the deed was done. His presence, moreover, ordinarily would serve as a preventative of crime, for even the boldest crooks have a keen appreciation of the ready resources of the famous detective and a righteous dread of openly opposing him.

The scene of the audacious crime referred to was the palatial Fordham residence of the Honorable Dexter Vaughn, accupying an extensive, handsomely laid-out estate overlooking the Botonical Gardens.

The occasion was the marriage of this wealthy statesman's only daughter, Beatrice Vaughn, a leading local belle and a favorite among the New York smart set, to the young banker, broker, and popular clubman, Daniel Dorrington, whose earlier sensational relations with a clique of crook gamblers of aristocratic pretensions had resulted in the murder of one of the ringleaders, the arrest and conviction of his two assassins, together with a treacherous private detective who was in league with the clique, all three of whom had been rounded up by Nick Carter and his assistants.

It was because of the service done them by the Carters that both Dorrington and Betty Vaughn had insisted upon their attending the wedding, and Nick, Chick, and Patsy Garvan were among the guests, and arrived only a short time before the hour set for the ceremony.

The customary stir and confusion then prevailed. The long driveway leading to the front of the brilliantly lighted house, around which it curved, passing under a side porte-cochère, and thence through the extensive grounds to a side exit into a rear street, was occupied by a constant stream of carriages and motor cars, the lights of which caused a blinding glare over the driveway, the adjoining lawns, and into the park to the west and rear of the imposing dwelling.

The scene within was doubly dazzling. The stairways, halls, and adjoining rooms, profusely decorated with June roses, were occupied by a steadily increasing throng of fashionable guests, gloved men in evening dress, radiant women in elegant attire, many of them ablaze with jewels, and all aglow with joyous anticipations.

Masked with potted palms back of the broad main stairway of the large colonial mansion, an orchestra was playing, its inspiring strains mingling with ripples of girlish laughter and the constant chatter of voices in lively conversation.

Nick Carter and Chick, his senior assistant, were standing in the front hall about fifteen minutes before the crime was committed, while Patsy Garvan was talking with several friends then indulging in cigarettes on an east veranda of the crowded house.

There was apparently not a cloud in the sky, not a shadow to mar the festive occasion, not so much as a sign of any impending evil. Nevertheless, viewing the jewel-bedecked women in the hall and drawing-rooms, Chick incidentally remarked, in tones intended only for Nick's ears:

"This would be a fertile field for the light-fingered gentry."

"Remarkably so," Nick agreed, settling his immaculate collar a little lower. "It would be soft walking. There are diamonds enough in sight from where we stand, Chick, to satisfy the most avaricious of that cult."

"To say nothing of the wedding gifts. I have attended a good many swell weddings, but I never saw a more superb and costly display."

"Both Dorrington and Miss Vaughn are very popular."

"A glance into that room on the second floor would convince one of that," said Chick, referring to a side chamber in which the bridal gifts had been placed for inspection. "A quarter million would be a conservative estimate."

"There is that much in gems and jewelry," Nick replied. "Dorrington's gift to his bride, that superb rope of pearls, is alone worth eighty thousand. A looter in that room could pack a fortune in a peck measure in two shakes of a lamb's tail."

"He'd never get away with the goods—not with that lynx-eyed Gus Akerman there," Chick said confidently. "Why did you caution me against speaking to him?"

"Because he is supposed to be one of the guests. His vocation and mission might be suspected, however, if we were seen talking with him."

"True. I should have thought of that."

"There are some, no doubt, who will think we are here as hired safeguards against robbery," Nick added. "That is the only reason why I was averse to coming. It might put us in wrong with—ah, there is Martin Morley, the criminal lawyer. I wonder whether Dorrington feels as grateful to him as to us? Does that occasion his presence here?"

"Grateful to Morley?" questioned Chick. "What do you mean?"

"He was retained by Jim Nostrand and his confederates, you know, after we nailed them for the murder of Bill Stanley. They figured that Morley, with his experience in criminal cases, and some little professional trickery of which he is capable, might pull them out from under the legal millstone."

"Rats! The devil himself could not have pulled them out."

"Very true," said Nick. "Be that as it may, however, Morley at once withdrew from the case when he learned how Dorrington had been treated by the rascals. They may have been friends before then, for all I know, but Morley surely must have seen that he was up against a hopeless fight."

The man under discussion then was threading his way through the throng in the parlor and approaching a door leading into the hall. There was nothing to distinguish him from a hundred other male guests, unless, perhaps, a remarkably square jaw and chin, with a broad, thin-lipped mouth, gave him a look of bulldog determination and tenacity not observable in most men. He was a well-built, muscular man in the forties, who had acquired some little distinction as a criminal lawyer, which had frequently brought Nick in contact with him in the courts.

In company with the lawyer was a handsome brunette in the twenties, whose fine figure was accentuated by a stylish, close-fitting costume trimmed with Irish lace. She was worming her way with sinuous grace through the throng near the open door, and Morley, briefly waiting for her, saw the two detectives near the base of the main stairway.

"Ah, good evening," said he, bowing and smiling. "Have you just arrived?"

"Ten minutes ago," Nick replied, a bit coolly, never having had a pronounced fancy for the lawyer.

"You beat me five," laughed Morley, displaying a double row of large white teeth. "I've been here only half as long. Very warm, isn't it?"

"'Tis so," Nick assented.

"And a terrible crush."

"True."

"Let me present my niece, Miss Lackland," said Morley, drawing the woman nearer and introducing both detectives. "She is very anxious to view the wedding gifts, which, I understand, are on the next floor."

"Yes, in a west-side chamber," said Nick, after acknowledging the introduction. "Miss Lackland will find them fully up to her expectations, I think."

"No doubt," said she, smiling and blushing.

"Dear me, this stairway looks hopeless," said Morley, glancing up at the stream of people then descending.

"Try the rear one," Nick suggested. "It's at the lower end of the hall."

"That may be better," Morley nodded. "Thanks for the suggestion. This way, Nellie, and don't lose me in the shuffle."

"I'll not lose you, Uncle Martin," replied Miss Lackland. "You open the way and I'll follow."

She glanced back over her shoulder, bowing and smiling again, then glided gracefully away between groups of chatting people in the hall.

"She's quite a striking woman," Chick remarked, gazing after her. "Morley's niece, eh?"

"So he said."

"Have you any doubt of it?"

"No, indeed."

"Your voice suggested something of the kind."

"I didn't intend that it should," said Nick. "I had heard that Morley has a very attractive niece, so it was no surprise to me. I suppose we now have had the pleasure of meeting her."

"They'll not have long to inspect the wedding gifts," replied Chick. "That is to say, if they care to witness the ceremony. It must be near the hour."

"Less than five minutes, Chick, if the knot is tied promptly at nine," Nick rejoined, glancing at his watch. "These people evidently are leaving the stairs in order to make room for the bridal procession."

Several couples then were descending the broad stairway, now bent upon seeking vantage points from which they could see into the front parlor, where, under a spreading canopy of June roses, a robed clergyman was waiting to perform the marriage ceremony.

The house butler, hastening down only a few moments before, was delivering a message to the orchestra leader.

The music suddenly ceased. The selection that was being played was abruptly ended. The significance of this was appreciated by an effusive young lady standing near the detectives with a party of friends.

"Oh, oh, it's time!" she exclaimed, in a flurry of excitement. "The orchestra has stopped. They're getting ready for the wedding march."

Many others were of the same mind. The hum of conversation began to abate. It died away to an almost impressive silence. Scores of eyes were turned toward the stairs, eager for a first look at the bridal couple. Those who could not see were listening. Hushed expectancy was pictured on countless faces.

But not one in all the crowded gathering expected—what presently occurred.

Half a minute passed.

The stillness continued unbroken—it was like the calm before a storm.

It was broken by a tall old clock in the hall. It began to strike—the fateful hour.

Instantly, mingling with the next stroke of the bell, swelling with inspiring melody on the close, oppressive air, came a flood of orchestral music, the familiar strains of Mendelsohn's "Wedding March."

Then, like thunderbolts out of the blue, came other sounds, appalling in their nature, affrighting countless joyous hearts and turning blushing cheeks to ghastly paleness.

From some point beyond the park east of the house came a terrific explosion. It shook the night air like the discharge of a fourteen-inch gun. Instantly overspreading the eastern sky rose a red glare like that of a great conflagration.

Startled hearers, the throng on the veranda, the front steps, the near lawn, and driveway, guests, chauffeurs, hackmen, and servants—all hurried impetuously toward the east side of the house to learn what had occurred.

At the same moment, as if they echoed the frightful explosion, wild shrieks arose in the house, scream after scream from terrified women, the shouts of men in sudden mad excitement, and mingled with all these came repeated cries of:

"Fire! Fire! Fire!"

Gazing up to the second floor, the direction from which came these last appalling sounds, Nick Carter caught sight of several terrified women rushing through the halls, others cowering near the wall with their faces covered, still others shrinking, faint with fright, on the stairs—and then all were swallowed up in a thick billow of smoke that rolled like a tidal wave through the hall and over the balusters and down the stairs.

CHAPTER II.

THE LOOTED CHAMBER.

Only two persons among the great throng gathered in the Vaughn mansion, Nick Carter and Chick, instantly suspected the probable cause of the sudden alarming disturbance.

Both had heard the distant explosion. Both had noticed that half a second had passed before it was followed by the shrieks in the house, by a momentary glare of light on the second floor, and then the cloud of dense gray smoke that rolled like a great billow through the hall and down the stairs.

Both reasoned with lightninglike rapidity, moreover, that a distant calamity outside could not have caused the seeming catastrophe in the house, and that these simultaneous disturbances must be parts of a design, the nature of which was immediately suspected by both.

Nick cast only a single glance up the stairs and over the horrified crowd in the lower hall. Turning to Chick, he shouted above the rising tumult of frightened cries:

"It's a job! The jewels! That way, Chick, to the back stairs! I'll go this way!"

Nick was bounding up the stairs before the last was fairly said. Mounting them four at a stride, thrusting aside the people who stood in his path, he quickly reached the upper hall and groped his way toward the door of the west chamber containing the wedding gifts.

In no direction could he see any signs of fire. The smoke, spreading quickly, had become less dense. These facts clinched his conviction that the entire sensational episode was part of a plot to rob the west chamber.

Before Nick could reach the door, however, he collided violently with a man who had rushed from one of the front rooms—Daniel Dorrington himself, the bridegroom, as pale as a ghost and in a state of frantic excitement. They both were somewhat blinded with the smoke, but each immediately recognized the other, and Dorrington wildly cried:

"Good Lord! Is it you, Carter? What has happened? My heavens, what has happened?"

"Robbery—unless we can prevent it," Nick shouted. "Don't lose your head! There is no fire. This way—come with me!"

Most of the women then had fled from the hall and entered adjoining rooms. Others were fleeing down a back stairway. Half a dozen strides brought Nick and Dorrington to the west chamber.

The door was closed and locked.

Nick threw himself forcibly against it. It withstood the shock. It did not, in fact, show the slightest sign of yielding.

"It has been barricaded within," he cried. "Put your shoulder to it, Dorrington. Here you, Morley, lend us a hand. We three should be able to force it open."

Morley had arrived upon the scene from the direction of the back stairs. He responded eagerly, also seeming to realize what had occurred, and all three men threw themselves against the door.

Their united efforts proved futile, however, and Nick abruptly turned and rushed into an adjoining room nearer the front of the house. Half a dozen terrified women stood trembling in a corner. One fainted and fell to the floor when the detective entered.

Darting to one of the windows, Nick threw aside the lace draperies and raised the roller shade. The window was wide open, but it contained a wire screen. Quickly removing it, Nick leaned out to see whether he could reach the windows of the closed room.

Both of them were wide open—but the room was in darkness.

Not a sound came from within.

Two feet directly below them was the broad, projecting roof of the porte-cochère.

From the window of a room above, dangling over the slightly projecting gutter, hung a stout rope, knotted at intervals of about a foot, and the end of which nearly touched the porte-cochère.

A glare of light in the driveway came from the lamps of an automobile that had nearly rounded a front corner of the house, but which still was being held up by a policeman, then standing with his arm uplifted as if to prevent the passing of the car until another, then under the porte-cochère, had departed.

Only the rear wheels of the other, however, were under the porte-cochère. Beyond the farther side of the roof, Nick could see the glare of its lamps, its front wheels and hood, a figure crouching in the driver's seat, two others hurriedly settling themselves in the tonneau—two men who had leaped from the roof of the porte-cochère only a moment before.

In another moment it was moving away, a huge gray touring car—and Nick Carter, to whom the whole knav-

ish job now was obvious, but who then was unarmed and unable to prevent the departure of the crooks, leaned farther from the window and yelled at the top of his lungs to the policeman:

"Officer, officer, stop that gray car! Hold up that gray car! Shoot the chauffeur, if necessary! Get those three men! Get them, even if you shoot all three!"

The policeman appeared to understand, and to be as eager to obey as Nick was to have him. He rushed at top speed after the car, while Nick still was furiously shouting his commands. He overtook it near the rear corner of the house, and the watching detective felt a momentary thrill of satisfaction.

Momentary, indeed!

For the policeman sprang upon the footboard and quickly leaped into the tonneau, then turned and waved his hand, shouting in tones of exultant mockery:

"All right, Carter! I've got them! We've also got the goods! So long, Carter—so long!"

Nick heard him distinctly. He knew he had been recognized in the lighted window, and these taunting cries brought an ominous frown to his strong, clean-cut face. Such mockery nettled him, even more than that such an audacious crime had been committed under his very nose.

Plainly enough, this man in a policeman's uniform was one of the gang who had briefly occupied the driveway only to hold up approaching cars, or otherwise aid his confederates with a pretense of authority, until they could do their infamous work and escape with their plunder.

Nick keenly realized, moreover, the futility of any immediate effort to overtake them, to trace them, or to hold them up by means of a police call, or use of the telephone Before the necessary steps could be taken, the fugitives would be miles away in an unknown direction, or already under cover.

There was an ugly gleam in the detective's eyes, nevertheless, when he drew back into the lighted room, where he quickly wrote with a pencil a brief memorandum on his cuff, having neither his notebook nor paper in his pocket.

Then, turning to the trembling women near by, he said hurriedly:

"Compose yourselves, ladies; there is nothing to fear. A robbery has been committed and the crooks have escaped, but you are in no personal peril. I am a detective and shall take immediate charge of the case."

Nick did not wait to saw more, nor for an answer, but hastened into the hall and rejoined Dorrington and Martin Morley. Other men had appeared upon the scene, Chick Carter among them, and vain efforts to force the closed door still were being made.

"Wait a moment, gentlemen," Nick exclaimed. "It will be useless to batter down that door. The trick has been turned and the thieves have fled. I will presently open the door for you."

"What do you mean, Carter?" Dorrington excitedly demanded.

"Precisely what I say, Dorrington," Nick replied. "Wait right there and be patient for half a minute."

Turning while he spoke, Nick ran up a back stairway leading to the upper floor. A lamp was burning in the narrow hall. It took him only a moment to find the room he was seeking. The door was closed, but not locked.

Entering the room, Nick found it unoccupied and in darkness. He could plainly see the open window, however, also the rope running over the sill, with one end of it tied to an iron bedstead. Slipping over the sill, Nick quickly descended the rope and alighted on the roof of the porte-cochère. Then, stepping through one of the open windows, he struck a match and found the switch key enabling him to turn on the electric light.

The scene that then met his gaze was about what he had expected.

On the floor in one corner lay a central-office detective, Gus Akerman, clad in evening dress, who had been employed to guard the wedding gifts that evening, though he ostensibly had passed as one of the guests. He had been knocked out with a sandbag and was still insensible.

The door of the room had been barricaded with two tables, so placed end to end that they were wedged against the opposite wall, precluding an entrance from the hall unless the door should be literally battered down.

On these tables, as well as on two others near the walls, many of the wedding gifts still were lying, but only those which crooks engaged in such a hurried and desperate job could not possibly have stolen.

They had made a clean sweep, however of all of the jewelry and gems—a superb rope of pearls, diamond sunbursts, expensive corsage pieces, a costly tiara set with diamonds and pearls, bracelets and brooches, pendants and pins, together with numerous valuable gold articles and ornaments, aggregating thousands of dollars in value—all had vanished.

Nick had expressed it truthfully, in fact, even though somewhat tritely, only a short time before—that a looter in this room could pack a fortune in a peck measure in two shakes of a lamb's tail.

Nick was far from suspecting at that time, of course, how soon the deed would be done.

CHAPTER III.

THE MAN WITH A BEARD.

So complex and sensational a drama can be only partly described. A multitude of details must be left to the imagination. Countless episodes occurred simultaneously, only the most important of which can be depicted. All transpired in far less time than is required to describe it.

From the time the explosion was heard, precisely six minutes had passed when Nick Carter entered the looted west chamber. In that brief time, nevertheless, the red glare in the sky east of the house had entirely disappeared. The starry heavens had resumed a normal aspect. There then remained of the smoke in the house, also, only a vague haze and a lingering, somewhat penetrating, odor, indicating that a chemical compound of some kind had been used, the momentary fusion of which had produced the sudden great volume of smoke.

Information concerning the nature and design of the disturbance had quickly spread, moreover, and the worst being known, or nothing more terrible anticipated, something like order and composure had taken the place of wild confusion and excitement.

Such was the state of affairs when Nick, after glancing sharply around the looted room, replaced the two tables and opened the door. He admitted only a few persons from the then crowded hall, however, including Dorrington and Mr. Vaughn, the bride's father, together with

Chick Carter, Martin Morley, and Patsy Garvan, his junior assistant, who had hurried in from the east veranda.

"Now, Dorrington, and you, Mr. Vaughn, let me give you a word of advice," Nick said at once, while he closed the door to exclude intruders. "This room has been robbed and the thieves have escaped. They cannot be overtaken, nor headed off, do what you will. The work of running them down and recovering the stolen property must be done later. I will undertake to do both, and you cannot do better than to place the case entirely in my hands. I will take immediate charge of it and proceed at once with the necessary investigations."

"Nothing would suit us better, Mr. Carter, I assure you," declared Dorrington, while Mr. Vaughn bowed with approval.

"In the meantime, then," Nick continued, "you have your house filled with guests who must be considered, and you had better proceed with the marriage and carry out your plans precisely as if nothing had occurred. That is the wisest, most dignified, and only consistent course to be taken. You have absolutely nothing to gain, moreover, by deferring it, or by taking any other."

"That certainly is true, Nick," Dorrington admitted.

"I also agree with you," said Mr. Vaughn. "I don't think we should let the robbery do more than briefly interfere with our plans."

"By no means," said Nick. "Proceed with them, then, and leave me here to begin my work on the case. I will do all that can be done. I already know pretty nearly how the crime was committed, and I think I can finally ferret out the whole truth. That, however, will take time."

"But what about Akerman——"

"I will have Akerman on his feet in a very few minutes," Nick interrupted, receiving a nod from Chick, who, with Patsy, had at once begun to take measures to revive the stricken detective. "He has only been knocked out with a sandbag, or a bludgeon of some kind."

"That's true," Chick put in. "He is not seriously injured."

"That being the case, then, I think we should act at once upon Mr. Carter's advice,' said Dorrington, turning to his prospective father-in-law. "What do you say?"

"I think so, too," Mr. Vaughn quickly agreed.

"Go ahead, then," said Nick, urging both toward the door. "Leave this knavish business to me. It's entirely in my line. Return to Miss Vaughn, Dorrington, and tell her to forget that a robbery has been committed. When you return from your wedding journey, I shall place the stolen property in your hands and announce that the thieves are behind bolts and bars.

"Comfort her with that prediction, Dorrington, and direct the orchestra to resume the wedding march. That will instantly reassure your guests and dispel the cloud. In the meantime—well, I shall be getting in my work all the while."

Nick's advice was too good to be disregarded. Both men shook hands heartily with him, hurriedly expressing their thanks, and then hastened from the room. The detective closed the door again, then turned to his two assistants and the waiting lawyer.

"By Jove, this was most unfortunate, Nick, occurring at such a time and on such an occasion," said Morley, gravely shaking his head.

"I agree with you," Nick replied. "Where were you when it occurred?"

"On the back stairs," said the lawyer. "I had come up here with my niece to view the wedding gifts, directly after we were talking with you in the lower hall."

"I remember."

"We had been here only a few moments, when one of several ladies here said that the marriage was about to take place. Nellie did not wish to miss seeing that, of course, so we started to return to the parlor. We were descending the back stairs when the explosion outside occurred."

"You heard it, then?"

"Distinctly. It was followed almost immediately by a flash of light and a quick cloud of smoke in the adjoining hall. I was completely staggered and don't know now what became of my niece. I think she must have fled down the stairs. Half a minute later, I heard your voice in the hall. You were shouting to Dorrington, and I hastened to join you, thinking I might be of some assistance. I did not then have any definite idea as to what had occurred."

Nick saw that Chick and Patsy were doing all that was possible to revive Detective Akerman, who now was showing signs of returning consciousness, and he continued to question the lawyer.

"Who, besides Akerman, was in this room when you left it?" he inquired.

"Akerman?" questioned Morley.

"This man,' said Nick, pointing. "He is a detective."

"Ah! I did not know that," said the lawyer. "I supposed he was one of the guests. He was here, of course, and I think two or three ladies. Several others departed just ahead of us and went down the front stairs. Others were lingering in the hall, but I did not specially observe them. I cannot say who they were."

"Did you see any men in the hall?"

"Only one, Nick, that I remember. Stay——" Morley broke off abruptly. "I did see another. I think he was the butler. I saw him going down the front stairs just as I was leaving this room."

"I saw him come down, also," said Nick. "Where was the other man?"

"I passed him as I was going toward the back stairs."

"Ah!" Nick exclaimed. "He was coming this way, then?"

"Yes."

"Did he enter this room?"

"I cannot say. I did not turn to see where he went."

"Did you know him? Can you describe him?"

"He was a stranger to me," said Morley. "I did not notice him closely, of course, but I can give you a general description of him. He was about my size, I should say, and somewhere near sixty years old. He was in evening dress. He wore a mustache and a short, pointed beard. His hair and beard were slightly gray. I thought him one of the guests."

"And I think him one of the crooks," Nick bluntly asserted.

"You do?"

"Undoubtedly. It's dollars to dried apples, Morley, that his beard was a disguise."

"Possibly."

"You saw him coming this way. He entered and probably knocked Akerman out when the detective's atten-

tion was diverted by the explosion, or by the flash and smoke in the hall. He then must have—ah, but Akerman will speak for himself in another moment. Set him up, Chick, with his shoulders against the wall."

A moan from Akerman, followed by a long sigh, had caused Nick's abrupt digression. The headquarters detective had opened his eyes and was gazing vacantly around, still dazed, but in a way to speedy recovery. He soon was able to tell what little he knew about the robbery, not only confirming Nick's suspicions, but also corroborating the statements Morley had just made.

"Half a dozen women were here about five minutes before I was keeled over," he explained, replying to a question from Nick. "One of them was Miss van Hook, a cousin of the bride, and the others appeared to be personal friends of hers. None of them can reasonably be suspected."

"I agree with you," said Nick. "Who afterward entered?"

"Only three persons, two of whom were Mr. Morley and a lady. I recognized him."

"The lady was my niece," put in the lawyer.

"But you remained only a couple of minutes," continued Akerman, then addressing him. "I heard Miss van Hook say that the marriage was about to take place. Four of her companions immediately left to go down to the parlor. You and your niece followed them from the room. I heard her say she did not want to miss seeing the ceremony."

"True. That is why we remained here no longer," said Morley. "Precisely, Nick, as I already have told you."

"Who, then, was here, Gus?" Nick inquired.

"Only Miss van Hook and an alderly lady, one of the friends with whom she had been talking. An elderly man entered half a minute later, however, and I supposed him to be the elderly lady's husband."

"Why so?"

"Because he spoke to her familiarly, though I did not catch what he said, and they then appeared to be discussing one of the gifts. He had not been here more than half a minute, however, when an explosion occurred outside."

"Exactly."

"Then, or almost instantly, came a flash of light in the hall," Akerman went on. "Women began to scream. I saw a big cloud of smoke. Naturally, of course, I turned toward the door, and I heard the elderly man utter a cry of dismay. He then was directly behind me, and that was the last I knew—barring a stunning blow on the head. I went down and out on the instant, and I know nothing about what followed."

"Did the elderly man wear a beard?"

"Yes, and slightly gray."

"The very man who passed me in the hall," said Morley.

"No doubt," Nick allowed. "What about these two windows, Akerman? Had you noticed that they are directly over the porte-cochère?"

"Yes, of course," replied the headquarters detective. "I wondered, for that reason, why this room had been selected for the display of gifts. I asked Mr. Vaughn about it. He said it was probably an oversight, and that he did not really think there was the slightest danger of a robbery. I made sure that the windows were both closed and locked, nevertheless, and I remained constantly here after seven o'clock. That's all I can tell you."

Nick turned to Chick and Patsy.

"Find Miss van Hook, Patsy, and see what she can tell you," he directed. "If she was here when Akerman was knocked out, she must know something about what followed."

"Sure thing, chief."

"Also inquire outside about a policeman whom I saw in the driveway, and about a gray touring car which left the porte-cochère immediately after the robbery. Find out when both were first seen, if possible, and how long the car had been there."

"I saw that car, chief, when it was leaving," said Patsy.

"Where were you?"

"Returning through the park east of the house. I heard the explosion and saw a glare of red light. I ran through the park, and found that it came from some red fire back of a stone wall. There was no one in sight, however, and I began to suspect that a robbery was on, or a job of some kind. I bolted back through the park, therefore, and saw the gray touring car when it came around from the west side of the house and sped along the driveway leading to the back street. I think there were four men in it."

"Four is right," said Nick.

"And I think, too, that I've got its number," added Patsy.

"I know that I have," Nick said dryly, displaying the memorandum on his cuff.

"It's not the right one," Chick quickly argued. "A gang engaged in a job of this kind would not have had the correct number on their car."

Nick did not reply, but signed for Patsy to follow the instructions given him.

All that could be learned later that evening may be told in a nutshell. Chick had made no discovery while striving to force his way through the excited crowd in the lower hall. It had taken him about three minutes to reach the back stairs, on which he then found Miss Lackland and several other frightened women, all of whom had come down from the upper hall, and who quickly assured him that no man had escaped in that direction. Then, hearing Nick's voice in the hall above, Chick had hastened up to rejoin him.

Patsy found Miss van Hook and her aunt, the elderly woman mentioned, in a state of hysteria in one of the front chambers. They informed him that they had seen Akerman struck down by the bearded man described, but that he was a stranger to both of them, despite the fact that he had spoken familiarly to them, and both had supposed him to be some friend invited by Dorrington. They further stated that, after felling the detective, he had violently forced both of them out of the room and quickly closed and locked the door, both having been too frightened to resist, and so overcome by the smoke in the hall that they had not, until questioned by Patsy, been able to report the circumstances.

Inquiries outside brought to light that the gray touring car had arrived under the porte-cochère only a moment before the explosion was heard. It then had contained only the chauffeur, and the few people who saw it supposed it was waiting for persons about to leave the house. None could be found who had seen men enter it by dropping from the roof of the porte-cochère.

The supposed policeman had suddenly appeared upon

the scene immediately after the gray touring car turned the front corner of the house and passed under the porte-cochère. He at once proceeded to hold up a large car directly behind the other, one containing several arriving guests, and he prevented the chauffeur from turning the corner of the dwelling. Otherwise, the glare from its lamps might have revealed to its occupants the roof of the porte-cochère, and what was taking place there.

In the meantime, while Patsy was obtaining the above information, Nick learned in precisely what part of the hall the momentary flash of fire had been seen. Searching the polished, hard-wood floor in that locality, he found numerous scattered particles of glass, very thin and nearly as fine as powder.

"This tells the story," he remarked to Chick, displaying several particles on the tips of his fingers. "A thin glass globe, or receptacle of some shape, filled with a chemical compound that instantly fused under concussion and liberated a great volume of smoke, was stealthily tossed upon the floor from another part of the hall by some person in league with the thieves. It was broken to atoms by the concussion and instantaneous fusion of the compound, which evidently fulminated like a quantity of loose gunpowder."

"I guess that's the explanation of it," Chick agreed. "But who was the traitor in the camp?"

"That question cannot be so easily answered," said Nick. "It's up to us to find out."

Exhaustive inquiries, however, evoked no information as to who could have thrown such an object, nor from what direction it had been cast. No one could tell who, or how many persons, were in the hall at the time, nor had any one seen anything of the kind previous to the blinding flash, after which the smoke, fright, and excitement had turned the heads of all.

The only other evidence worthy of mention was that which Nick already had discovered—the knotted rope dangling from the window of a room directly over the looted chamber.

It was little enough, all that had been learned—surely very far from enough, one would have said, to warrant the confident prediction that had been made by Nick Carter.

CHAPTER IV.

NICK CARTER'S THEORY.

Eight o'clock the following morning found Nick Carter, Chick, and Patsy Garvan seated in the business office of the detective's Madison Avenue residence. They were engaged in an earnest discussion of the problem confronting them.

It was, in some respects, a very simple one—merely a remarkably daring robbery committed by an unknown gang of crooks, assisted by others who, either in the guise of guests, or treacherous friends who really had been invited to the wedding, had succeeded in entering the house.

It was, in other respects, a very difficult problem. Though there was an abundance of evidence, it was of a kind that must be delicately handled. It would not do, both Dorrington and the Vaughns had insisted late the previous evening, to offend their many guests with inquiries and investigations denoting that they were regarded with suspicion. It would be better to suffer the loss and let it go at that. Whatever was to be done along those lines, Dorrington and his wife had insisted, must be done under the surface. There was nothing, moreover, that pointed even indefinitely to the identity of the criminals, and only a very few clews that appeared to be of any material value.

Despite these facts and the restrictions imposed upon him, the consistency of which he recognized, in spite of the resulting disadvantages, Nick Carter tackled the problem with his customary confidence, appreciating that the more delicate it became, the more skill he must employ. He had been presenting these features to Chick and Patsy that morning, and he now took up the more practical side of the matter.

"To begin with," said he, "it is not difficult to reconstruct this job. It was cut, dried, and planned to a nicety. That was done with a definite knowledge of the conditions to be met and the difficulties to be overcome."

"And that, Nick, plainly shows that some person in the house must have provided the crooks with the necessary information," put in Chick. "An outsider could not have done so. No outsider would have known in which room the wedding gifts were to be displayed. That must have been definitely decided some little time before the wedding, a day or two, at least, and the crooks must have been informed well in advance of last evening, or they could not have planned so complex a job so perfectly."

"Very true."

"The question is, then, or one question, at least—who in the Vaughn residence was in league with the robbers?"

"I have thought of that, Chick, and we will presently consider it," said Nick. "First, however, let's take a look at the job itself, and the way it was done."

"Go ahead, chief," said Patsy. "What do you make of it?"

"It was, as I have said, planned to a nicety. It involved a number of persons, who, provided with watches set precisely alike, were to act simultaneously at an agreed-upon moment."

"Nine o'clock," put in Patsy.

"Exactly," said Nick. "That moment probably was selected because it was the time fixed for the marriage ceremony, when nearly all of the guests, if not all, would be in the parlors and on the lower floor, or heading in that direction, leaving the gift room comparatively deserted."

"That's about the size of it."

"At precisely nine, then, the several crooks occupied points agreed upon, and proceeded to get in their work."

"Beginning with the explosion."

"Right," said Nick. "That probably was produced with a huge cannon cracker, and the immediate glare with a quantity of ordinary red fire."

"I'm sure of that, chief," said Patsy. "I saw fragments of the cracker on the ground back of a wall, and the red fire had not burned out when I got there. The crook who did that part of the job had fled."

"The design of it is obvious," Nick continued. "It was calculated to draw in that direction the attention of all persons then out of doors. It was designed to attract them to the east side of the house, or the opposite side from that on which the porte-cochère is located, and where the crooks had planned to get in their rapid work."

"That was the design, Nick, surely," Chick observed.

"And it worked admirably," said Nick. "For when I looked from the chamber window, there was hardly a person on the west side of the house."

"I don't see how there could have been," declared Patsy.

"A mob of guests, chauffeurs, hackmen, and servants came running around to the east side, where I was standing on the veranda. Everybody was watching the red glare, and none even heard the disturbance in the house."

"That was part of the scheme," said Nick. "The flash and smoke in the upper hall was designed to cover the knocking out of Akerman and the hurried work of his assailant in the gift chamber. He at once barricaded the door, then opened the windows and admitted a confederate, who, having stealthily concealed himself in the room above, quickly dropped the rope he had ready for the purpose, and slid down to the roof of the porte-cochère."

"Gee! it seems as if some one outside would have seen him," said Patsy.

"Not so," Nick replied. "In fact, Patsy, quite the contrary."

"Why so, chief?"

"Because of the bright glare of light in the driveway and over the adjoining lawn from the automobile lamps. Their rays did not reach the upper part of the porte-cochère, where the darkness was deeper and less penetrable owing to the contrast, and because of the glare in the eyes of persons standing on the ground."

"I see," said Patsy. "That, also, was a part of the scheme."

"Certainly. Furthermore, after admitting his confederate and bagging all that they could carry from the gift chamber, which could have been done in a couple of minutes, the crooks switched off the electric light. This left in darkness the two windows directly over the porte-cochère."

"I see the point."

"They then sprang out and tossed their bag of plunder into the waiting touring car, which their chauffeur confederate had run sufficiently far through the porte-cochère to bring the tonneau where they could easily drop into it from the edge of the roof. The entire job could have been done, and, in fact, was done, within five or six minutes. That, moreover, is precisely the way it was done," Nick confidently added.

"Precisely how it was done—that's all very good, Nick, as far as it goes," said Chick thoughtfully. "How are we to pick up the trail of the crooks who did it? That, it strikes me, is vastly more important."

"I agree with you."

"Have you hit upon any way?"

"One already has been suggested," said Nick. "The crooks must have had a confederate in the Vaughn residence, presumably one of the servants. We cannot reasonably suspect one of the family."

"Certainly not. How many servants do they employ?"

"I don't know."

"You did not inquire?"

"Far from it. I made it a point not to do so."

"For what reason?"

"Because I wanted it to be inferred that I do not suspect any of the servants," Nick explained. "If the guilty one is among them, inquiries would put him on his guard, or her, as the case may be. Wariness and exceeding caution would follow. On the other hand, if relieved of any serious apprehensions, the culprit may become bold, or even careless, and sooner or later, will seek an interview with his confederates, or they with him. We must watch out for that."

"An espionage?"

"Exactly. You must go out there this morning, Patsy, and begin operations. Find some concealment from which you can watch the house and each entrance into the grounds. Keep an eye on adjoining streets, also, and give the servants special attention. If one of them goes out, or if any one shows up outside whose actions warrant suspicion, find out who they are and what's doing."

"Trust me for that," said Patsy. "I'll get next, all right, and trail any suspect to cover."

"Do no more than that, however, unless you see a way by which you might recover the stolen jewels," Nick directed. "They must be located, at least, before any arrests are made."

"I understand," Patsy assured him. "I'll not go over the traces, chief, take my word for it. I'll have the Vaughn place under surveillance inside of an hour."

"Very good. While you are at work along that line, I will undertake with Chick to trace, or identify, the big gray tourning car used by the robbers."

"That looks like a hard hunt, Nick."

"I think it can be done."

"How so?" Chick inquired incredulously. "There are a thousand such cars in New York City. We are by no means sure, moreover, that it was a New York car."

"Very true," Nick admitted. "I think, nevertheless, that it can be done. These, as a matter of fact, are the only two promising lines along which we can begin our work. There would be nothing in getting after the fences, for the crooks will make no immediate attempt to dispose of their plunder. You proceed at once, Patsy, as I have directed. In the meantime, take it from me, I'll round up that bandit car."

Nick spoke with customary assurance, but Chick Carter still appeared incredulous. He did not see how it could be done.

CHAPTER V.

THE WOMEN IN THE CASE.

It was half past nine when Patsy Garvan arrived in the neighborhood of the Vaughn residence and set about the work assigned him. Approaching through the back street, from which the grounds were divided by a high boxwood hedge, he found with no great difficulty a concealment from which he could plainly see the back of the house, the side door under the porte-cochère, also a part of the walk and driveway leading out to the front street.

This vantage point consisted of a clump of lilacs and shrubbery at one side of the garage, which Patsy reached by worming himself through the hedge mentioned, selecting a point hidden by the garage from the view of any person in the house.

"This fills the bill, all right," he said to himself, after nestling under the shrubbery and sizing up the outlook. "It covers every avenue of approach and gives me a plain view of the back door and windows. That's the door from which the servants would be likely to leave, in case there is anything doing. It looks like an all-day job for me, however, even if the chief is right."

Anticipating a long vigil, Patsy settled himself as comfortably as possible on the ground and fell to watching the back door and side windows. He could see servants in the kitchen, evidently a male chef and two women, who appeared to be washing dishes. A gardener was raking and sweeping the front driveway, which was strewn with

rice, confetti, and several old shoes. He was the only person then visible in the sunlit grounds.

Contrary to Patsy's anticipations, however, not more than a half hour had passed when the doings of a new arrival upon the scene convinced him that Nick was right, and that the ball had begun rolling.

Patsy first heard his steps in the back street. They were not like the quick, uniform steps of others who had passed, bent only upon ordinary business. They faltered now and then, which quickly aroused Patsy's suspicions, and turned him in that direction.

He discovered him after a moment, and could see him quite plainly through the foliage of the hedge—a slender, thin-featured man in a checked blouse and overalls, carrying on his arm a market basket containing a quantity of spinach, two heads of lettuce, and several cucumbers.

"By Jove, he's no provision dealer's clerk," thought Patsy, after briefly watching him. "He's slower than cold molasses, or a district telegraph boy. He doesn't look the part, either. He looks more like a stuss fiend from the crime precinct."

The man with a basket was pausing at intervals to peer through the hedge, though always toward the back windows of the house, as if looking for some one. Presently, upon approaching a gate opening upon a walk leading to the back door, he drew something white from his vest pocket and slipped it up the sleeve of his blouse.

Then, proceeding slowly up the walk, as slowly as if time was of absolutely no value, he began to shrilly whistle a new popular song, his piercing notes rising high above those of numerous robins and sparrows in the trees of the near park and surrounding grounds.

"Come and get me, honey!" thought Patsy, quick to recognize the popular air. "By Jove, that's very significant. You're whistling to some one in the house, as sure as I'm a foot high, and you're here to deliver a letter. That's what you slipped up your sleeve."

Patsy's suspicions were confirmed while the man was still twenty yards from the back door of the house.

A slender, girlish figure appeared at one of the second-floor windows, a girl whose simple attire plainly indicated that she was one of the servants. She parted the lace draperies hurriedly, gazed down at the approaching man for a moment, and then she nodded quickly and pointed toward the side door of the house.

"Gee!" Patsy mentally exclaimed. "The chief was right, for fair. There's a servant in the ring. That fellow has raised her, too, and—but he's not going where she pointed."

The man with a basket did not appear to have seen the girl. He knocked on the back door and tendered his basket to the chef, who answered the summons, but the chef declined to receive it. A brief discussion followed, as if the provisions had been brought there by mistake. The man with a basket appeared perplexed. He finally turned away, apparently undecided, and then he headed—not for the back street again, but around the house and toward the front driveway.

As he was approaching the porte-cochère, the same girl came out of the side door—ostensibly to shake a dust cloth.

She shook it so vigorously that she dropped it—and the man hastened to pick it up and return it. He gave it to her without pausing—but with it, he gave her the letter concealed in his sleeve.

Patsy Garvan, though he did not see the last, was convinced of it. Two courses now appealed to him. One, to follow the man. The other, to remain and wait the movements of the girl.

Patsy decided almost instantly. He saw that he could not possibly cross the grounds and overtake the man without danger of being observed, and he also reasoned that the man might, after all, have been only hired for the trick he had just turned, and that he might not return to his employer.

Patsy promptly decided to make the girl his quarry.

"It's a safe gamble that she has received instructions which, sooner or later, will start her from cover. She'll not risk using the house telephone to reply, that's a sure thing, and if she slips out to send a letter—well, I can intercept that, all right. It's the girl for mine, by gracious, let come what may."

Patsy soon saw her again. She appeared in a new quarter and had undergone a change. He caught sight of her in the upper room, directly over the scene of the robbery, that which Nick suspected had served one of the crooks for concealment, from which he had descended to the roof of the porte-cochère.

The girl then had a white handkerchief folded under her chin and tied at the top of her head.

Patsy instantly hit upon the truth.

"Toothache, eh?" he said to himself. "Not by a long chalk. If that isn't a subterfuge to obtain leave to go out for a time, ostensibly to have a tooth extracted, I'll eat my hat. She'll hike out presently to answer that letter."

Patsy was considerably puzzled for a time, nevertheless, over what the girl was doing in the upper room. He saw her pass the window now and then, crouching as if looking for something on the floor, and finally she came directly to the window and leaned out, gazing into the gutter and down to the roof of the porte-cochère. After a few moments, with a quick gesture that could not be mistaken, she picked something out of the gutter, and then hurriedly drew back into the room and disappeared.

"She has found it, all right, whatever she was seeking," Patsy rightly reasoned. "It's dollars to fried rings that that letter related to it, or she would not have begun a search so quickly. By Jove, I have it! The crook who was in that room last night must have left something, or lost it accidentally. He missed it this morning and feared it might be found there. It must be something that would establish his identity, since he wrote the girl to search the room. She evidently found it in the gutter. Her next move will be to go out and relieve his fears."

Though Patsy was entirely right, he waited more than an hour before the girl again put in an appearance. She then came out of the side door, clad in street garments, and holding a handkerchief pressed to her cheek, as if suffering from a severe toothache.

"An artful dodge, and it has worked all right," thought Patsy, waiting to note which way she would turn. "I can see where she'll suffer a genuine ache a little later, one compared with which a toothache would be like a sweet dream. Ah, that shows me the way!"

The girl had turned south upon reaching the side street, and Patsy now stole quickly from his concealment. He picked her up before she had covered a hundred yards, darting to the opposite side of the street and remaining a safe distance behind her. She then had thrust her handkerchief into her pocket and was walking quite rapidly.

Patsy shadowed her to town, and half past one found

her walking to and fro near a quite notorious restaurant in Forty-third Street, a place patronized at all hours after midday by the better class of men and women of the fast set.

Obviously, she was waiting for some one.

"The guy who delivered the letter, or the man who sent it," thought Patsy, watching her from an opposite doorway. "In either case, by Jove, it's a cinch that he was one of the crooks."

In view of these convictions, Patsy was somewhat surprised five minutes later, when a fashionably dressed woman joined the girl nearly in front of the restaurant, greeting her in a way plainly indicating that she was the expected party. There was a striking contrast between them, nevertheless, for the woman was richly and stylishly clad, evidently quite young, and blessed with a very fine figure.

Though her face was so closely veiled as to preclude recognition, her figure and carriage impressed Patsy quite familiarly. He stood watching the couple, muttering to himself:

"Gee! that's strange. A woman, instead of a man. But a woman could not have done the trick from that upper window. Where the deuce have I seen her? She's a swell looker, all right, but how does she fit into this case? Why has she an appointment with a servant? It may be—ah, I have it! That move settles it. She was sent by the man who wrote to the girl. He did not dare risk meeting her himself."

Patsy jumped at these conclusions, when, after talking earnestly for several moments, the girl slipped a small object into the hand of the woman, then turned abruptly away, and hurriedly departed—a move that again put Patsy on a fence as to which of the two he should follow.

"She's bound back to the Vaughn residence," he said to himself. "If not intending to return, she would have had no occasion to feign a toothache. By Jove, I'll get after the woman. I want a look at her face."

The stylishly clad woman then was entering the restaurant.

Patsy foresaw that he might encounter an acquaintance, and that recognition might prove fatal to his designs. He drew back into the doorway and deftly adjusted a simple disguise with which he was provided, and which he felt sure would serve his purpose. Then, quickly crossing the street, he peered through the restaurant window.

The woman, still veiled, then was entering one of the numerous booths that flanked each side wall of the large interior, where many of the tables then were occupied by persons at lunch, or drinking in couples or parties, to the strains of a string orchestra in an end gallery decorated with potted palms.

"Fooled again," thought Patsy, catching sight of the woman just as she entered the booth. "She might at least have raised her veil before ducking into that stall. It's odds she intends waiting for the man who sent her to meet the servant. He's going to join her here to learn what the girl—no, by Jove, I'm wrong! Another woman, eh?"

Another woman had entered the same booth. She also was closely veiled and fashionably clad. She had passed within two feet of the watching detective half a minute before, though unobserved by him until she entered the booth to join the other.

"Two women, eh?" thought Patsy, somewhat perplexed. "Both closely veiled, too. There must be something doing that I'm not wise to, so I'll proceed to get next. I'll begin with having a look at their faces. It's a cinch that neither will recognize mine."

Sauntering into the restaurant, Patsy deliberately selected a vacant table directly opposite the booth occupied by the two women. He did so without even a glance that way till after he was seated. He demurred, in fact, until after a waiter had taken his order, consisting of a light lunch and some Pilsner, and then he gazed carelessly in the direction of the suspects.

Both women then had raised their veils. One of them, the last who had entered, was an entire stranger to Patsy. But the other—a score of vivid recollections leaped up in his mind when he beheld her strikingly handsome face.

"Holy smoke!" he mentally exclaimed. "Hang me, if it's not—Violet Hyde!"

CHAPTER VI.

PATSY TAKES CHANCES.

The murder of Bill Stanley, a gamester, whose body Patsy had seen on the floor of his hotel apartments; the running down of Jim Nostrand, the hotel detective, and of Flip Flynn, Ned Paddock, and Jerry Coyle, the Josh, for the shocking crime; the involving of Dan Dorrington in the mess, after his having been decoyed into the net of a gang of crook gamblers by the seductive face and artful wiles of an unscrupulous woman, this same Violet Hyde—these were some of the recollections that leaped up in the mind of Patsy Garvan.

"By thunder!" he said to himself, impressed with the significance of what had transpired. "Can it be that some of Stanley's old push have done this job? Have they taken this method to get back at Dorrington, and, at the same time, line their own pockets? There was a big bunch in that gang, including Providence Phil Dacey, who runs a big gambling house in Forty-fourth Street, and whom Nick suspected of having had a finger in cheating Dorrington out of a barrel of money. The chief is sure, too, that some bigger gun than Providence Phil is back of that Forty-fourth Street joint, but he has never been able to discover his identity. Gee! this begins to look like business, all right, and then some. Violet Hyde, eh? Who the dickens, I wonder, is her running-mate?"

Patsy's countenance had not changed by so much as a shadow when he recognized the woman, nor while indulging in the above soliloquy, during which his eyes had been averted from the couple. He now gazed that way again and discovered that—both women were looking at him.

Then, when their gaze met, Violet Hyde smiled at him—and winked.

Patsy, as quick as a flash, hit upon the truth—that he had been recognized.

As quickly, too, he realized that he must act instantly; that he must either respond to these overtures, or pretend that he had no interest in the couple. He knew, of course, that the latter would fall flat. He foresaw, too, that it would put him out of the running, put the women so upon their guard that he could not shadow them with any hope of success.

He realized, on the other hand, that they certainly had some counter design in attempting to cultivate his acquaintance, assuming, of course, that he would suppose they regarded him only as a stranger. He reasoned, also, that he

might be led into a game from which he could not withdraw without the ruination of his own design, nor yet continue without serious personal peril.

Nevertheless, instantly sizing up the situation, Patsy promptly decided to take the most promising course, even though it was also the most hazardous. He returned smile for smile and wink for wink.

Miss Hyde's companion laughed lightly then, and Violet signified with a coquettish cant of her head that she wanted him to join them in the booth.

Patsy bowed and arose to do so. At the same time, he cancelled the order which the waiter then was placing on his table, slipping him the price and a generous tip, as well. Then, entering the booth, he took a seat beside Violet Hyde, saying affably, yet with no sign of recognition:

"Pardon me, ladies, for keeping you waiting. I had ordered a lunch and was under obligations to settle. We'll start fresh from the scratch, all three, if agreeable to you."

"Decidedly so," replied Violet, smiling and shaking hands with him. "Otherwise, I should not have given you a hint to that effect, Mr. ——"

"Donald—Jack Donald," said Patsy, ready with a fictitious name.

"Jack Donald—ah!" laughed Violet, bowing. "Let me introduce myself—Miss Violet Hyde, Mr. Donald."

"Delighted," said Patsy.

"And now my friend—Miss Nell Lackland."

"Great Scott!" thought Patsy, recalling what Nick had told him about meeting her at the wedding. "Martin Morley's handsome niece! Something doing, by Jove, is right!"

Patsy was bowing and shaking hands with Nell Lackland while these last thoughts flashed through his mind. He now was doubly sure that he was up against a crafty game of some kind, and doubly sure, too, that he could hope for no success except by playing the game to a finish, let the risk be what it might. Dauntless always, he resolved to take a chance of being able to finish it—not as his crafty companions presumably designed, but to his own advantage.

"This gives me unexpected pleasure," said he, pretending to be already hard hit with the beauty of both women.

"That feeling is mutual, Jack—I suppose I may call you Jack?" Violet archly inquired, pressing Patsy's hand for a moment.

"Yes, sure thing," he replied. "Nothing would suit me better—except to prolong our acquaintance."

"That's up to you, Jack."

"Good enough! We shall become very good friends, then, I assure you."

"I hope so. That will be fine," Violet declared, smiling and blushing. "What do you say, Nell?"

"Those are my sentiments, all right," said Miss Lackland, with a nod of approval. "Good friends are at a premium in these days."

"That's right, too," Patsy agreed. "I'm as tickled over the prospect as a cat with two tails. But say——"

"Well?"

"Tell me why, on the level, you selected me for your favors. Give it to me straight."

"Oh, that's easily told," replied Violet, laughing.

"Well?" questioned Patsy, with a smile.

"First, because you are an attractive and very agreeable-looking chap."

"Ah! That listens good to me. But I was not aware of it."

"You are, nevertheless."

"I'm very glad to hear you say so, Violet, with the accent on the you," laughed Patsy. "I'll hand you a medal of myself, or buy a full-length mirror for personal admiration."

"I'll loan you mine, Jack."

"You're very kind, but I could not accept it."

"No?"

"It would be cruel to deprive it of the pleasure of reflecting so charming a person."

"Nonsense! You flatter me now."

"Not so, I assure you," Patsy insisted. "Was there any other reason?"

"For what?"

"For affording me this pleasure?"

"Oh, yes," Violet nodded. "Two other reasons."

"Namely?"

"One, because you looked so very lonely, Jack, seated all by yourself at that table. We thought you would enjoy poor company better than none."

"Poor company, eh? You are not in that class," Patsy protested. "What was the other reason?"

"Well, to tell the truth, we have a use for you."

"Good enough! What is it?"

"You impress us as being a fine fellow and a good sport——"

"Oh, I'm the last, all right," Patsy put in. "I'm there with both feet at all stages."

"Capital!" Violet declared, laughing. "You play cards, of course."

"Cards—well, I should say so. I play twenty-nine games and play them all well."

"Good! Bridge is among them, of course."

"Well, rather. I'm in the same class with the man who made the game."

"Fine! You're just the man we want, then," said Violet.

Patsy had not a doubt of it. He pretended to be a willing victim to her wiles, nevertheless, and inquired eagerly:

"For what?"

"We need a fourth hand at bridge this afternoon."

"Where?"

"At my home. That's not far from here."

"Who is the other party?"

"A friend, who will join us there a little later," Violet glibly informed him. "He is one of Nell's friends. There will be no others, and we can have a delightful time. Small stakes, you know, but genuine good-fellowship."

"That listens good to me," declared Patsy, as if he saw no menace in the proposition.

"You'll go with us, then?" questioned Violet, again pressing his hand.

"Will I—you bet! I'm very glad of the opportunity."

"We'll go at once, then."

"Wait!" said Patsy. "Let me buy a cold bottle first, and drink to your health."

"Not here," Violet protested, clasping his arm. "Save your money. There is wine to wash in where I live. Besides, Nell's friend may arrive before us. He will be disappointed if he fails to find us there."

"That's right, too," Nell Lackland put in. "We'd better go at once."

"Good enough, then, if that's your wish," said Patsy

agreeably. "My time is my own, ladies, and I'm entirely at your service."

"Charming!" whispered Violet. "I knew I read you correctly."

"Oh, you'll find me agreeable, Violet, and as game a sport as ever came down the pike," Patsy assured her, a bit dryly. "Are we ready?"

"Yes."

Both women had drawn down their veils. Patsy arose and accompanied them to the street. He had resolved to go the limit with them, taking chances of being able to outwit them, and knowing that any other course would surely result in their giving him the slip, or taking measures to foil any covert move that he might attempt to make.

"Shall I hail a taxi, Violet?" Patsy familiarly asked, upon emerging from the restaurant.

"No, indeed, Jack," she murmured. "It's not a great distance to my home. We can walk it in five minutes. I own the house. It's in Forty-fifth Street. I really prefer to walk."

"So do I, Jack," Nell Lackland assured him. "I enjoy walking."

Patsy assured himself, on the other hand, and in spite of the existing uncertainties, that neither would enjoy the walk he would subsequently give them.

CHAPTER VII.

A BAD MAN'S THREAT.

Patsy Garvan viewed with seeming indifference the residence to which he accompanied Violet Hyde and Nell Lackland. It was a brick house of three stories, with a high rise of front steps, under which was the door of a basement hall, adjoining a dining room and a rear kitchen. Interior screens at the lower windows and lace draperies at those above prevented outsiders from obtaining any view of the interior.

Miss Hyde led the way up the steps and opened the door with a latchkey.

"Come in, Jack, and make yourself at home," she said, smiling. "Do what you please and go as far as you like. There are no restrictions in my shack."

"That sounds very hospitable, I'm sure," replied Patsy, hanging his hat in the hall.

His companions quickly removed their street garments and placed them in the front parlor, into which Patsy followed them. The attractively furnished room was unoccupied. He had seen no one in the hall, nor heard any one in other parts of the house. He did not believe, nevertheless, that it was deserted.

Patsy knew that he was walking into a trap, in fact, but he did it voluntarily, knowing that he thus could get the information he wanted, even though he might have his troubles before he could turn it to account.

"Come this way," said Violet. "We'll play in the back parlor. It's time your friend was here, Nell, if he's coming."

"He'll show up presently," said Nell confidently.

Patsy followed them through a heavily curtained doorway and into the rear room. The two windows overlooked a small back yard and the rear elevation of a block in Forty-fourth Street. The roller shades were partly lowered, and lace draperies prevented a view from outside. A table, covered with green baize, occupied the middle of the room. Four chairs were placed around it, while a score pad and two decks of cards were lying on it. An open door led into a rear hall.

"Here we are, Jack," Violet exclaimed. "Cozy enough, eh?"

"Cozy is right," Patsy rejoined. "That hardly expresses it."

"Have a chair, Jack; either you like. Nell's friend should have been here by this time. He promised faithfully that he would come, but something may have detained him."

"I'm content," laughed Patsy. "Time passes quickly in such delightful company."

Both women joined in his laugh, as if his remark afforded them sinister amusement, and Patsy, while passing back of the chair he was about to take, deftly slipped his revolver to a side pocket of his sack coat, where he more quickly could reach it, if occasion required.

The occasion, though not the opportunity, came much sooner than he anticipated. Neither woman had observed his significant move. Patsy scarce had seated himself and withdrawn his hand from his pocket, however, when the portière was parted and a man quickly entered from the front parlor.

"Don't go to that pocket again, young man!" he said quietly, yet with ominous intonation. "Keep your hands in sight. If weapons are to figure in our game, this shall be the one, and I the one to use it."

Both women stepped back involuntarily, yet neither appeared much surprised.

The man had stepped quickly to the table at which Patsy had seated himself. He was a tall, clean-cut, well-dressed man in the forties, with curly hair, slightly gray, and a pleasing face, aside from its sinister expression.

Giving weight to his threat, which had been uttered with coolness and quietude evincing unbounded assurance and nerves of steel, he displayed a handsome, silver-mounted revolver, aimed with seeming indifference at Patsy Garvan's head.

Patsy knew him well by sight and reputation—Phil Dacey, popularly known as Providence Phil, a man noted for his desperate daring and cold-blooded determination, though both were usually concealed under an assumption of oily suavity and external polish.

Patsy glanced at the revolver, then at the two women, and then he met the searching scrutiny of Dacey's cold gray eyes.

"Well, what's the meaning of this?" he inquired, folding his hands on the table.

"That's right—keep them there," said Dacey, sitting directly opposite and keeping Patsy constantly covered. "We'll presently discuss what it means."

"Going to discuss it with a gun?" Patsy tersely asked.

"Yes, if necessary. But with this one—not the one in your side pocket," Dacey said pointedly. "Luckily, peering through the portière to learn who was here, I saw you shift your weapon."

"Ah! I see!"

"What did you intend to do with it?"

"Use it—if necessary," said Patsy coolly.

"I take it, then, that you have changed your mind."

"Yes—temporarily."

"H'm! Is that so? Temporarily, eh?" said Dacey. "Tell Ike and the Topper to come up here, Nell. They are in the lower entry."

Nell Lackland started to obey, but it was needless. Both

men referred to had been listening on the stairs, and bot hastened up and into the room.

Patsy knew them, also. Both were members of a gang of notorious card sharpers, Ike Devlin and Moses Klein, the latter known as the Topper, because of his dexterity in cheating by means of what is called "topping the deck." It consists, in brief, of stealthily placing desired cards on the top of a deck about to be dealt, or part of a deck remaining to be dealt, that they may fall to himself, or to a confederate.

Both men were well dressed, still under thirty, and would have passed in a crowd as entirely respectable. But each had the sinister expression and shifty eyes of the crook and trickster.

"Something doing?" Klein asked apprehensively, as he entered.

"Apparently, Topper, but I don't know just what," said Dacey, with his eyes constantly on Patsy. "We'll get at it presently."

"What's wanted?" Devlin demanded.

"He has a gun in his right coat pocket. Slip it into your own," Dacey directed. "Then see what else he carries."

Both men hastened to obey, while Patsy, seeing plainly that he was booked for a complete exposure, coolly remarked:

"You'll find another gun on my hip, a pair of handcuffs in a lower pocket, a searchlight in——"

"Ah!" Dacey interrupted. "You're a plain-clothes man, eh?"

"Or a crook," said Patsy. "It's up to you to determine."

"We can easily do so, I imagine," Dacey retorted sarcastically. "Fasten the bracelets on him, Topper, with his hands behind him. He might try to get gay."

"Done while you're speaking, Phil!"

"See, now, whether that mustache—ah, it comes off easily without a razor," Dacey exclaimed, when the Topper rudely removed Patsy's disguise. "I thought as much. It strikes me, too, that your face is now quite a familiar one. You're Patsy Garvan, one of Nick Carter's push, aren't you?"

"Sure thing, Phil, he is," Violet Hyde now cried sharply, displaying her true colors. "What need to ask him?"

"Merely to see what he'd say," replied Dacey, while Devlin and Topper Klein drew back, grinning, but each with a malevolent light in his evil eyes. "Where did you run across him, Violet?"

"Nell is the one who got wise," was the reply.

"Wise to what?"

"He was watching me and Maudie from a doorway," Violet proceeded to explain. "Nell piped him, and judged that he had been following the kid. She knew him, all right, and saw him disguise himself and get after me."

"Where were you, then?"

"I was in the restaurant, where I had agreed to meet her. She came in at once and put me wise."

"H'm! just so."

"We then framed up a scheme to bring him here—where he'll be less dangerous, Phil, than when nosing into our affairs. That's all there was to it."

"Did Maudie find the bauble?" inquired Dacey.

"Yes."

"Ah! that's very lucky."

"She found it in the gutter, just outside of the upper window," Violet added. "Corrigan raised her by whistling the old, familiar tune, and—well, it looks as if this fly gun had his lamps on both of them. Leastwise, that's what I make of it."

"You're not far from right, I think," said Dacey, "Give me the bauble and I'll hand it to the big finger a little later. I'll have to see him and put him on his guard."

"That's right, too," Violet declared, with a nod. "The sooner, Phil, the better."

"Now, Garvan, what's it all about?" Dacey demanded, turning to Patsy.

"What's what all about?" questioned Patsy, apparently not in the least concerned over the threatening turn of affairs.

"Oh, there's nothing in ducking and dodging," said Dacey, with a frown. "You may as well hand it out. Why were you watching these women?"

"Try a guess, Dacey," said Patsy. "You ought to be good at guessing. Any one ought who has played the bank as long as you have."

"That's all you're going to say, is it?"

"All along that line," said Patsy. "I'm not dishing up information for you fellows."

"Well, we don't happen to need it, Garvan, as far as that goes," Dacey retorted.

"You're playing lucky, then."

"We know all about what has come off, or what is likely to come off," Dacey added sneeringly. "You are out on the job done at the Vaughn place last night. Carter snapped at the case like a hungry trout. I reckon he suspected it might be the work of some of the gang that did Dorrington a while ago. But he's got nothing on us."

"Except me," suggested Patsy, a bit dryly.

"You're of no account."

"No?"

"Not the slightest," said Dacey, with ominous earnestness. "You don't cut as much ice, Garvan, as a dirty deuce in a clean deck. You're in wrong. You are out of the running from now on—take that from me."

"Better men than you have said as much, Dacey, only to be fooled at the finish," Patsy retorted. "A wagging jaw never hurt any one. You'll have to show me. I'm not worrying."

"Nor am I," snapped Dacey, with threatening asperity. "As a matter of fact, Garvan, I'm glad that this business will bring something to a head. Do you know what I mean?"

"I neither know, Dacey, nor care," said Patsy.

"I'll tell you, nevertheless, and with very few words," Dacey forcibly asserted, scowling darkly. "Nick Carter has had it in for me ever since that Dorrington affair of months ago. He has made two or three back-handed attempts to frame up my place, and he would have made good, too, if I hadn't had help from outside."

"What put that bee in your bonnet, Dacey?" Patsy inquired.

"Never mind what. I know it to be a fact."

"Don't you believe it, Dacey."

"Believe what?"

"That Nick ever attempted to frame up your place. If he ever does attempt it, take it from me—he'll do it," Patsy pointedly declared. "There will be no slip-up, and all the help you can pull from outside will not save you. He'll put you and your place on the bum. You'll go down and out on greased rollers."

"Is that so?"

Dacey's eyes had taken on an ominous gleam and glitter.

"You bet it's so—whenever Nick attempts it."

"I'll make sure, then, that he never will," Dacey declared, rising abruptly. "There's one sure way by which it can be done. I'll go out and get him, as we've got you. It's time that some one canned him—and I'll be the one to do it."

"You will!" Patsy laughed derisively. "I guess not!"

There was a look on Dacey's face, nevertheless, denoting that he meant what he said.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE NUMBER-PLATE CLEW.

N. Y. 1183.

Nick Carter was studying the above intently. He was seated in his swivel chair at the desk in the study of his Madison Avenue residence. It was more than an hour after Patsy Garvan had departed that morning. He had ended a hurried perusal of his morning mail, with Chick's assistance, and the latter had just finished dictating two replies that could not be deferred.

It then was after ten o'clock.

N. Y 1183

It was the memorandum Nick had made on his cuff the previous evening—the license number on the big gray touring car that had been used by the robbers.

Nick had read it distinctly when the car sped away and turned the rear corner of the Vaughn residence.

"Well, what do you make of it?" Chick inquired, after dismissing the stenographer. "What's your hunch?"

Nick settled back in his chair and gazed at him.

"You were right when you said last night, Chick, that crooks engaged in such a job would not have had the correct number on their car," said he.

"I think so," replied Chick, drawing up a chair.

"But you overlook one possibility."

"What is that?"

"Suppose the crooks secretly used the car of some person on whom they wanted to cast suspicion."

"H'm! that might be," Chick murmured. "They would not, in that case, have changed the number"

"Surely not."

"But that theory seems a little far-fetched."

"We will not ignore it, nevertheless," said Nick. "I'm going to find that bandit car. The initials showed that it bore a New York license and the number was 1183."

"We can easily learn at the license bureau whose car bears that number."

"We will presently do so," said Nick. "There still is the other side of the question."

"That the number had been changed."

"Exactly."

"What, then?"

"There are two very simple ways by which that can be done," said Nick. "One is by removing the number plate and substituting another."

"Certainly."

"That would not be adopted by crooks about to commit a robbery, however, unless they already were in possession of a second plate, which, even then, might betray them, if they had previously used it."

"Quite likely."

"Clever crooks would not take that chance, nor would they risk obtaining a plate elsewhere, lest that might expose them."

"That's right, too," Chick agreed.

"I think we can drop that method, therefore," said Nick. "Another is by eliminating one, or even more, of the figures on a plate by covering them with thick grease, colored with lampblack, which can be wiped off in a moment, if necessary. That method, however, leaves blank spaces, which give the number a suspicious appearance, and which also would be avoided by clever crooks."

"True again," Chick nodded.

"Another and much better method is to alter one or more of the figures so as to produce a different number," Nick continued.

"I see."

"That may be done by covering only parts of a figure with the same material. There are, of course, some figures that cannot be altered in that way. In fact, only four and eight are easily changed in such a way. A four may easily be turned into a one, or an eight into a three, as you can see by an examination of the printed figures."

"Certainly. That's plain enough, Nick."

"And I think that is the method most likely adopted by these crooks," Nick said confidently. "Other methods require paint, and have obvious disadvantages. Paint can not be easily and quickly effaced entirely, in case of necessity, but grease may be wiped off with the palm of one's hand."

"I see the point, Nick, of course," said Chick.

"Now, have a look at this number," Nick proceeded, glancing at a pad, on which he had written it, 1183.

"That is the number that was on the bandit car," he continued. "Assuming that one or more of the figures had been altered in the way I have suggested, the plate might really have contained either of six other numbers, 1483, 1488, 4183, 4188, 4483, 4488."

Chick gazed over his shoulder and nodded.

"Exactly," said he. "The figures could be changed to form either of those numbers."

"And I have a hunch, Chick, that one of those was the proper number on that car," said Nick. "At all events, I now am going to call up the license bureau and find out whether any car bears that number, and also who owns it."

"That's the stuff," Chick exclaimed. "By Jove, this may provide us with a clew worth following."

"Some little time may be required, however, to cover all of the numbers," Nick added. "I will find out about the number displayed, to begin with, and then—well, we shall see."

Nick took up his telephone, and, after making himself known to the authorities, soon obtained the information he then required. He learned that a touring car bearing the license number 1183 was owned by Mr. William Mayfair, No. —— Vail Street, Washington Heights.

"Good enough!" he remarked, hanging up the receiver. "I want you to go up there at once, Chick, without waiting for me to inquire about the other numbers."

"Up to Harlem?"

"Yes."

"Do you suspect Mayfair?"

"No."

"What's your scheme, then?"

"I think that this gang of rascals, knowing that we are on the case, will feel a bit anxious to learn whether we are making any efforts to identify their car."

"No doubt."

"In that case, Chick, thinking we may have learned what number the car displayed, they may have a spy watching the Mayfair place, bent upon learning whether we go there to inspect his car, or to make any inquiries."

"By Jove, that's a good gamble," Chick declared, with some enthusiasm. "To shadow the spy, in that case, would be our proper course."

"Yes, by all means," said Nick. "The only course would be to lie low and run him to cover."

"Exactly."

"The sooner you arrive in that locality, then, the better," Nick pointed out. "That is why I advise your going at once."

"No sooner said than done," replied Chick, rising to make a hurried departure. "Give me the address once more. If I make any discovery of importance, I will telephone you."

"Very good. Do so."

Chick was hurrying out before the last was said.

Nick turned to his desk again and took up the telephone. Having again got in communication with the license bureau, he once more stated what he wanted, giving the clerk the six numbers about which he then inquired.

Twenty minutes had passed when the answer came.

Taking a pencil and pad, Nick prepared to write down against each license number the name of the person who owned the car. He did so, one after another, and not until the very last did he realize that he had made a big stride forward.

The clerk reported the number over the wire, and then announced the owner's name:

4488—Mr. Martin Morley, No. —— Amsterdam Avenue.

"Morley—Martin Morley!" Nick exclaimed, after thanking the clerk and hanging up the receiver. "Morley was at the wedding with his niece. Both went to the gift chamber just before the robbery. Both were on the back stairs, or claimed to have been, within twelve feet of that room, when the crime was committed.

"By Jove, I believe I've landed the big finger of this gang. I've often seen Morley with Phil Dacey, the gambler, and Morley may be the very man who has been backing that Forty-fourth Street joint. I know the house has been losing heavily for the past three months, and this robbery may have been committed to replenish the bankroll.

"Morley's car may have been used with an altered number, moreover, rather than risk hiring another. By Jove, I'll soon find out. I'll have a look into Morley's garage."

There was an expression of grim satisfaction on Nick Carter's face when he left his residence five minutes later. He hastened to the nearest subway station, where he boarded a train that left him within five minutes' walk of his destination—Morley's house in West End Avenue.

It proved to be an attractive wooden dwelling on a corner, with a small yard in the rear, containing a stone garage and an entrance from the side street.

Nick knew that Morley was a widower, that he dwelt only with a niece and his servants, and he was not surprised when he saw the curtains quite closely drawn and no sign of Miss Lackland in the house.

After rounding the corner, however, Nick discovered that the garage was open and that a stocky, dark-featured man in the twenties, smoking a pipe, was seated in a chair on the cement driveway near the open door.

As Nick walked into the yard and obtained his first look at the car, he met with a surprise.

The bandit car was a big gray one.

Morley's car—was black.

There it stood, bearing the proper number, 4488, as black as a coal and recently washed.

The man seated near the door did not stir from his chair. He had removed the pipe from his mouth, however, and Nick thought he looked a little pale around his ears.

"Is Morley at home?" he inquired, gazing at him.

"No, sir. He's at his office, or in court. There is no one at home just now."

"Are you his chauffeur?"

"I am."

"What's your name?"

"Tom Stagg. Why?"

"I'm thinking of buying a car, and I'd like to examine this one," said Nick.

"Go ahead," said Stagg. "I don't think Mr. Morley would object."

"No, indeed! I'm well acquainted with him."

"It's a good car, all right," Stagg added, apparently not in the least concerned.

Nick walked into the garage. He was a bit puzzled. He had expected to find a gray car, not a black one. He walked around it and examined the number plate on the rear. It was remarkably clean and glossy, as if it had been recently polished.

Crouching as if to inspect the tires, Nick discovered that the cement floor of the garage, which still was damp from the recent washing, bore faint streaks of gray, as if a fine powder had mingled with the flowing water.

Those streaks, which were hardly discernible, in fact, led to a drain pipe in the cement floor back of the car. Nick lifted the iron strainer and looked into the pipe.

It was covered with a fine gray coating.

Stagg had remained in his seat and was lighting his pipe.

Nick sauntered out and rejoined him.

"It looks like a good car, all right, as you say," he remarked, pausing in front of him. "It's been washed lately, hasn't it?"

"This morning," Stagg nodded.

"Were you out with it this morning?"

"No."

"Last evening?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"To a wedding in Fordham. What is it to you, anyway?"

"Nothing. Have you a key to this door?"

"Yes, of course. But——"

"Lock it."

"Lock it be hanged!" Stagg cried, starting up, with a growl. "Why the devil are you questioning me in this fashion? Get out, or——"

"Stop right there, Stagg," Nick interrupted, checking him with a gesture. "Lock that door and hand me the key. You are under arrest. Hold on—none of that!"

With face gone ghastly, Stagg had uttered a fierce snarl and oath, then hurled himself against the detective in a

desperate attempt to throw him aside and find safety in flight.

Nick had expected no less, and he met him halfway. Quickly seizing the rascal's right wrist with his left hand, he threw his right arm across Stagg's breast, then tripped him over his leg and hip and landed him flat on his back on the cement driveway, with a violence that nearly sent the last breath from the chauffeur's body.

Nick then whipped out a pair of handcuffs, and in a moment had them locked on his prisoner's wrists.

CHAPTER IX.

OUT AFTER HIS MAN.

Nick Carter spent very little time with Tom Stagg, who, when he found himself in irons, became as grim as a sphinx and dumb as an oyster.

Nick turned him over to the first policeman they met, and at precisely three o'clock that afternoon he entered the law office of Mr. Martin Morley, on the third floor of a building in upper Broadway.

He found Morley alone. The lawyer was seated at his rolltop desk, engaged over a big batch of legal papers. He appeared somewhat surprised when the detective entered, but in no degree disconcerted.

"Why, hello!" he exclaimed, in greeting. "This is an unexpected pleasure, Carter."

"Don't rise," said Nick, checking him with a gesture, and then drawing up a chair. "I'm not going to remain very long. How are you to-day?"

"Tired," Morley tersely replied, with a grimace. "Knocked into a cocked hat."

"That so?"

"The excitement of last night got on my nerves. I couldn't sleep. No more weddings for mine, Carter."

"You think you'll not take in any more, eh?"

"That's what," grinned the lawyer.

Nick thought so, too.

"What more have you learned about the robbery?" Morley asked more gravely. "Anything?"

"Only a few facts," replied Nick evasively. "I've dropped in to see what more you can tell me."

"What more I can tell you?"

"Exactly."

"What is that—a joke?" demanded Morley, with brows knitting.

"No, no joke," said Nick. "I also wish to know just what relations exist between you and Phil Dacey, the gambler."

"What relations, eh?"

"Precisely. You are acquainted with him, aren't you?"

"Yes—but nothing more."

"Is that so?"

"Just so!" Morley forcibly declared, frowning more darkly. "What do you mean, Carter, by approaching me in this fashion? Your inquiries are becoming impertinent."

"Oh, don't regard them in that light," Nick said calmly. "I merely am out after information."

"Well, you've come to the wrong place to get it."

"I'm not so sure of that. I've heard, Morley, that you are the big finger back of Dacey's gambling house in Forty-fourth Street."

"You have?"

"Yes."

"Absurd!"

"I have had parties keeping an eye on that place, also, and I know positively that its games have been losing heavily for several months. In fact, Morley, ever since Bill Stanley was murdered and Dorrington slipped through the fingers of the gang before they could bleed him of his entire fortune. This same gang, Dacey, in particular, I have heard, since have felt very sore and been anxious to get back at me for having put Dorrington wise to their knavery, thus pulling him out of their clutches."

"I know nothing about those matters, Carter," Morley said coolly. "I hardly know what you're talking about."

"It should be of interest to you, then, as a bit of news," replied Nick dryly.

"Humph! Is there anything more?"

"Yes, considerable more," said Nick. "Because of the facts mentioned, Morley, I am led to suspect that this robbery was the work of the same gang of which Dacey ostensibly is the head. Running low in funds, it would have appeared like a quick way to replenish the bankroll."

"You're a wise guy, Carter," Morley growled resentfully. "And because of an absurd suspicion that I am interested in this place, you have called to question me in this insolent fashion. Is that about the size of it?"

"Well, yes, to be perfectly frank with you," Nick allowed.

Morley's teeth met with a snap and his lips took a quick downward curve. He looked like a dog about to bite.

"See here, Carter——"

"One moment!"

Nick checked him with a gesture, then pointed his finger straight at the lawyer's breast.

"Don't lose your head, Morley, nor get angry," he quickly advised. "You had much better discuss this matter calmly and quietly. I'll be good enough even to give you a tip, one a man of your profession should appreciate. Don't say more than you know you can safely say—for I may use it against you."

"Against me!" Morley forcibly echoed. "Against me! What do you mean by that, Carter? What do you mean by it?"

"Precisely what I say," replied Nick. "I want a little information which I think you can give me."

"About what?" snapped the lawyer.

"I want to know who played the part of a policeman last night, who discharged the cannon cracker, and lit the red fire east of the Vaughn mansion. I want to know which two of the crooks were concealed in that upper room over the gift chamber, for there were two who escaped in the car, not counting the policeman. I want to know which of the Vaughn servants admitted them, after putting this gang wise to the conditions that had to be met in order to commit the robbery."

"And you think I can tell you?" said Morley, as black as a thundercloud.

"I certainly do," said Nick.

"Well, you are damnably mistaken."

"It is quite necessary that I should discover the identity of those persons," Nick proceeded, disregarding the lawyer's angry vehemence. "I also wish to know, Morley, precisely what part you and your niece played in the game, and which of you threw the glass globe containing fulminating powder, also where you contrived to disguise yourself unobserved by any of the guests. It probably was

done on the back stairs, down which you came after you knocked Akerman out, paved the way for the robbery, and then climbed to the upper room by means of the rope which your two confederates had left for the purpose. Tell me, Morley——"

"See here, Carter——"

"Oh, there is nothing for you in denying it," Nick sternly interrupted. "I have the whole business down pat. All I require are the names of the criminals. You'd better make a clean breast of it, Morley, and provide me with them. That's your only hope."

Morley's drawn features had turned as hard as flint and as gray as ashes. His suppressed rage had given place to a ghastly calmness, that was doubly ominous because of the contrast. He drew forward in his chair, with his fiery eyes fixed on the stern face of the detective, and said through his teeth:

"You shall pay for this, Carter—you shall pay dearly for this! I deny every word that you——"

"And I already have told you, Morley, that denials will not avail you anything," Nick again interposed. "A straight story is all that will be of any help to you, and very little help, at that."

"You don't mean——"

"I mean just what I say," Nick interrupted. "I have got this case down pat. I know that your touring car was used for the robbery. The number plate was altered, that it might not be identified, and that inability to discover the bandit car might complicate matters, your car was covered with a gray coating of some kind, that could afterwards be easily and quickly washed off. You——"

"My God!" Morley gasped. "If that is true——"

"Oh, you know very well it is true, Morley," Nick cut in sharply. "Your ghastly face is a sufficient confession. I've got your chauffeur, moreover, Tom Stagg, and he now is in custody. I've been out and had a look at your car and the drain pipe in your garage. It contains evidence that only a blind man would deny. Your only hope—no, no, by thunder, not that!"

Morley had turned suddenly in his swivel chair and had pulled open an upper drawer of his desk.

Nick caught the glint from a revolver, and on the instant he was up and had the lawyer by the wrist, at the same time snatching the weapon from the drawer and thrusting it into his own pocket.

"Not by a long chalk, Morley," he sternly added. "You're going to take your medicine like a man, not cheat justice in that way. You pull yourself together and prepare to go with me. If you make another move of that kind, I'll put you in irons."

There was very little need of the threat.

Morley had collapsed in his chair as if his last ounce of strength had left him. He heard the threat, however, and muttered hoarsely and brokenly:

"No, no, not irons! I'll go with you, Carter, but you'll get nothing out of me—not a word!"

"As you like about that," Nick said indifferently.

"Not a word—not a word!" Morley repeated. "I'll fool you yet. I'll beat you yet."

"Close your desk and put on your hat."

Morley arose unsteadily and obeyed. His knees were shaking under him. He looked like a man on whom the hand of death had been suddenly laid.

Nick took him by the arm and led him out of the office. There was only one person in the adjoining corridor when he emerged. He had just come up a back stairway leading from a narrow court in the rear of the building. He was a tall, clean-cut, slender man—with a full beard.

It was about thirty feet from the door of Morley's office to the head of the back stairs, where the man suddenly halted.

He saw Nick Carter and recognized him—and he saw the ghastly face of Martin Morley.

There could be no mistaking what had occurred.

As quick as a flash, though Nick had glanced in that direction and saw him pause, the man whipped out a revolver and fired three shots in quick succession.

Bang—bang—bang!

The reports rang like cracks of thunder through the entire building.

The bullets whizzed by the detective's head and were buried in the plastered wall behind him.

Morley uttered a yell of fright.

Nick threw up his hands and pitched forward upon the floor—a ruse to prevent another shot.

A veil of smoke filled the corridor—and the would-be assassin, seeing the detective fall, turned and fled at top speed down the back stairs.

Nick did not delay to dispose of Morley. He leaped up and pursued his assailant, tearing at breakneck speed through the corridor and down the stairs.

"Dacey—Phil Dacey!" he muttered, while he ran. "I'll swear to his identity in spite of his disguise. I've heard that he has threatened to get me. We'll see—we'll see!"

Nick was right as to the man's identity. Seeking Morley in his office to tell him what had occurred in Violet Hyde's house, also that he had started out to get the detective, he had taken the precautions to disguise himself and enter by the back way, lest Morley might afterward be suspected. He had, purely by chance, arrived just in time to see Nick departing with the arrested lawyer.

Dacey supposed that he had killed the detective, but before he had reached the base of the second flight of stairs, he heard Nick's fast and furious steps on the floor above, and he at once suspected the ruse that had been adopted. He did not wait to renew hostilities, did not dare to; but he muttered an oath and leaped with redoubled speed down the lower stairway and into the narrow court.

Though the weapon had been heard throughout the building, at once filling the corridors with excited people, they were quickly left behind by the detective and his quarry. The flight and pursuit came down to them alone.

For Dacey, though he fled rapidly, did so in a way least likely to attract attention, darting back of vehicles and across the streets into which he turned, all the while striving to hide himself from his pursuer.

Nick had an eye on him, however, and suspected his destination. For Dacey was heading in the direction of Forty-fourth Street, and that part of it in which his gambling house was located.

Sprinting at top-speed the last fifty yards, moreover, Dacey arrived at the house well in advance of the detective. Pale, wild-eyed, and panting for breath, he rushed up the steps and let himself in with a key.

Nick Carter arrived at the steps ten seconds later. He mounted them four at a stride and threw himself against the door. It was opened almost instantly, much to his surprise—but a huge negro barred his further progress.

"Stand aside!" Nick commanded. "Where is Dacey?"

"Mr. Dacey, sah? He's not here, sah," cried the darky, grinning.

"You lie! I just saw him enter."

"No, sah! He——"

"Stand aside!"

"You're wrong, sah! He ain't——"

Nick closed the argument, and also the negro's mouth, with a blow that sent him reeling toward the rear of the hall. He was prevented from falling by the baluster rail of the broad stairway.

Nick drew his revolver and strode into the hall, glancing sharply around. There was no one in sight except the negro, who had retreated to the rear of the hall, looking frightened and staggered, standing with his shoulders against the closed door of a back room.

"Where is Dacey?" Nick repeated, striding toward him. "Out with it, you black rascal—where is Dacey?"

"I dunno, sah," gasped the darky. "I——"

"You lie! Open this door."

"I kain't, sah! I——"

"Hark, you!" Nick seized the brass knob of the door and thrust his revolver under the darky's nose. "You've got just five seconds! If the door is not open—I'll shoot!"

The negro, seeing that Nick had his hand on the knob, sprang away from the weapon—apparently. In reality, he was getting away from the door.

"All right, sah," he shouted loudly. "All right."

Instantly, there came a blinding flash and a sharp cracking sound.

Nick Carter recoiled as if struck by lightning. He was lifted bodily from the floor and hurled backward as if from a catapult. His every nerve and muscle went lax. He fell in a heap, insensible, ten feet from the door.

Nick had been floored by an electric shock, a current nearly powerful enough to have killed an ordinary man—a current conducted through the brass knob of the door.

The darky quickly darted to the front door and closed it.

Only two men and a somewhat startled woman were gazing up the rise of steps, as if wondering what had occurred. They moved on when the negro closed the door.

Phil Dacey had opened the other and stepped into the hall.

"It's all right, boss," cried the negro. "Nuffin' doing. He was stark alone. Dere ain't no one coming."

"Are you sure, Tony?"

"Dead sure, sah."

"Watch out, then, and admit no one," cried Dacey, glancing at Nick's inanimate form. "This place is closed for the day. We'll wait for darkness and then shift him to the other house. I'll phone for some of the gang to lend me a hand. By Heaven, 'twas a close call—but we've got him! We've got him!"

CHAPTER X.

THE RECKONING.

Nick Carter rang a bull's-eye when, with customary foresight and a keen anticipation of every possible contingency, he sent Chick Carter to Harlem that morning on the mission already mentioned.

Chick did not go directly to the residence of Mr. William Mayfair, who, he easily learned, had a private garage on his place. Soon after noon he entered in disguise the grounds of an adjoining resident, where he saw a groom at work in the stable.

Approaching the man as if he were an old acquaintance, lest the spy he was seeking might at that moment be watching him from some concealment, Chick quickly explained the situation and remained in apparently friendly conversation with the groom, taking a seat on a box in the stable.

Chick's design, of course, was to discover the spy before the latter should see and suspect him, and he had foreseen that the groom might put him in a way of doing so, as the Mayfair grounds could be plainly seen from the stable doorway.

It presently appeared, moreover, that Casey, the groom, had seen a strange man pass both places several times that morning, now on one side of the street, then on the other, apparently with a covert interest in that locality, and the groom had been led to wonder who the fellow could be.

Chick remained in the stable, talking all the while with his companion, and something like half an hour had passed when the same stranger again put in an appearance, sauntering along the opposite side of the street.

He was not, howeevr, a stranger to Chick Carter. The detective instantly recognized him—one Harry Hobart, a professional gambler and crook, who twice had been convicted of petty larceny, and on one occasion arrested by Chick himself.

"That does settle it, by Jove," he said to himself. "Hal Hobart, eh? This looks as if the robbery was the work of some of Phil Dacey's gang. Nick hit the nail on the head, all right, and it now should be soft walking to trail this rascal to cover. Having got my eye on him, I'll make sure he doesn't get his on me."

Chick thanked Casey for the favor conferred, cautioned him against betraying any further interest in Hobart's movements, and he then left the stable by a rear door and stealthily made his way to a back street. A few moments later he discovered Hobart watching the Mayfair house from behind some shrubbery in an opposite estate, and from that moment Chick did not lose sight of him.

The espionage proved of longer duration, however, than he anticipated. For it was after six o'clock when Hobart, who evidently was acting under instructions, abruptly departed in the direction of the nearest elevated station.

Chick Carter shadowed him to a saloon in Third Avenue, near Forty-second Street, where Hobart spent more than an hour at dinner, incidentally absorbing several large glasses of beer. It was after eight o'clock when he emerged from the saloon, from which he went directly to—the house to which Patsy Garvan had been conducted by Violet Hyde.

Dusk then had deepened into darkness. There was a gray mist in the sky, completely hiding the stars, while a steady drizzle with occasional drops of rain were falling. A salty wind was blowing from the East River, and the night was far from agreeable.

Chick was about thirty yards away on the opposite side of the street, when Hobart mounted the steps and rang a signal with the electrical doorbell. It brought Violet Hyde to the door to admit him, and both vanished into the house, but not before the watching detective, having

darted quickly to a nearer doorway, saw and recognized the woman.

"Violet Hyde—by gracious, I now know I am right," thought Chick, pausing briefly and surveying the house from basement to roof. "She's been Dacey's intimate friend since Bill Stanley went down and out. This house must be directly back of his place in Forty-fourth Street. He just about rents it for her, in order to provide a secret get-away from his gambling joint, in case of need. A light in the front parlor, but otherwise as dark as a pocket. There must be something doing, or why did Hobart go there, instead of to the other house. Is this one serving as a headquarters for those of Dacey's gang who committed the robbery? In that case—by Jove, I'll see what I can discover."

Moving away a short distance, Chick crossed the street and then cautiously approached the house. Darting under the front steps, he listened at the door of the basement hall. Not a sound came from within, but through the keyhole he could see a thread of light under the closed door of a back room.

"There is somebody in the kitchen," he said to himself. "I'll try the back yard and see what can be learned. It's only a minute's walk around the block."

Hastening in that direction, Chick speedily found the entrance to an alley running between a double row of small back yards between the two blocks of dwellings. Having noted the precise location of that which Hobart had entered, he stole into the alley, where the darkness was relieved only by the occasional lighted windows of the near houses on either side.

Chick had covered about thirty yards and arrived nearly at a point between the suspected house and that occupied by Dacey for gambling purposes, when sounds from the yard back of the latter suddenly fell on his ears.

Crouching close against the high board fence, he presently heard whispering voices, then the shooting of a bolt, and almost immediately a gate ten feet ahead of him was opened. Four men, bearing the bound and gagged form of another, then were dimly discernible in the alley a fifth carrying a burlap bag, and all moving toward the open gate of the opposite yard, that of the house Hobart had entered.

Though Chick's immediate conjecture hit very near the truth, a muttered command from one of the men instantly confirmed his suspicion.

"No noise, mind you, and don't drop the infernal sleuth. Once in the other house, along with that cursed cub cornered by Violet, we shall have two of them dead to rights. I'll soon find a way to land the other."

"The other—that's me," flashed through Chick's mind. "And that's Phil Dacey's voice and figure, as sure as I'm a foot high. The rascals have caught Nick and Patsy. The landing shall be on the other leg, by Jove!"

The four men, laboring somewhat in the alley with their burden, were passing through the other gate, but Chick heard the next words uttered by Dacey.

"You return, Corrigan, and lock the back door, then bolt the gate, and come over the fence. I'll leave the other door ajar for you."

One of the men, a stocky chap in a gray coat and slouch hat, darted across the alley and into the yard back of the gambling house.

The others entered the house fronting on Forty-fifth Street.

Chick Carter did not hesitate an instant as to the course he would shape. Drawing one of his revolvers and grasping it by the barrel, he crept nearer the two gates. He heard Corrigan bolt the one from which the gang had emerged, and then saw him scrambling over the fence.

Chick waited until the rascal, turning, dropped to the ground. Then, with a bound, he rapped him just once on the head with the butt of his revolver—and Corrigan went down and out as if struck by a sledge.

"Dead to the world for a good strong hour, at least," Chick muttered. "By that time, barring a slip, I shall have called the turn. Nick must be alive and kicking, or the miscreants would not have bound him. I'll see what I can do to liberate him."

While these thoughts passed through his mind, Chick stripped off Corrigan's gray coat and hat, and put them on, leaving his own in the alley. Then, with a revolver in each hand, he followed the gang into the house.

The basement hall, the door of which Dacey had left ajar for his confederate, then was deserted. A bright light came through the open door of the near kitchen, also the voices of some of its occupants.

Chick waited for a few seconds only.

"You're sure about it, Hobart?" Dacey was asking. "There must be no slip-up, now that we have landed two of these detectives and got things coming our way."

"Sure of it—yes, dead sure, Phil," was the reply. "No cat ever watched a rat hole as I've been watching to-day. There has been no sign of a detective near the Mayfair place."

Chick crept near enough to peer into the room. Three men, including Devlin and Topper Klein, were placing Nick Carter on the floor near one of the walls. Dacey was standing near by and Hobart in front of him. Violet Hyde and Nell Lackland were seated at the opposite side of the room.

Chick felt sure that he had cornered all of the gang then in the house, and that was all he then really wanted.

"Good enough!" Dacey exclaimed, replying. "We'll get Chick Carter a little later and clean up that bunch of meddlers. See where Corrigan is, Hal, and then lock the back door. We'll divide this plunder, and——"

Chick, seeing Hobart turning, brought the situation to a quick and decisive culmination. He stepped to the door, with both revolvers leveled, and said sharply:

"I've taken Corrigan's place, Dacey. Careful—now don't get gay! There are bullets waiting for every person who shows fight."

"God above—Chick Carter himself!" gasped Dacey involuntarily, staggering as if struck in the face.

Half-smothered screams broke from the two women, but Chick's stern voice seemed to drown all other sounds.

"Not a move, you, except as directed, or these guns will begin to bark. Hands up, one and all, and be quick about it! Then line up against that bare wall, faces toward it, and await further orders. I'll plug the first who lowers a finger."

There was no sane defying of Chick Carter at such a time and under such circumstances. Though there were muttered oaths and bitter imprecations, he was promptly obeyed, and he soon had the dismayed gang easily at his mercy, with their faces to the wall and their hands in the air. With one eye constantly on them, and a weapon constantly ready, he quickly cut Nick's bonds, and—well, from that moment there was very little to it.

Nick then was none the worse for the shock he had received in the gambling house. Patsy was found and liberated in a very few moments, and within ten minutes all of the crooks, including Corrigan, were either in irons or in bonds from which they could not escape. Ten o'clock saw one and all of them safely lodged behind prison bars.

Morley was arrested in disguise at midnight in the Grand Union Station, where he was about boarding a northbound express, and the treacherous servant in the Vaughn residence was taken into custody the following morning.

In the burlap bag which Dacey had brought from his gambling house, the doors of which were closed from that day, were found all of the stolen jewels secured the previous night, and which were returned within thirty-six hours to their owners. Dorrington and his wife were informed by wire of the remarkable work of the Carters, and return messages of congratulation and gratitude were speedily received. These by no means constituted, however, the reward given to Nick and his assistants.

The latter's deductions had, from the first, been almost absolutely correct, and they here need no review. The conviction of the gang, all who had taken an active part in the robbery, followed a month later, and all received the limit of legal punishment for the crime.

THE END.

"Blood Money; or, Nick Carter's Personal Letter," is the title of the story that you will find in the next issue of this weekly, No. 69, out January 3d. It is a sequel to the story that you have just read, and one of unusual interest. In the "case" that is told in narrative form in this story, you will find the great detective at his best; resourceful and daring, always. Nick Carter in this instance succeeds in rounding up as wicked a pack of criminals as ever preyed on society.

INTERESTING TRICKS WITH ICE.

About this time the boys learn to make a snowball. Squeeze it gently in the hand and you may have a soft, white mass, that breaks into pieces when thrown against anything. Press it harder and it becomes more solid. Press it harder still, and it will change color, and becomes gray and icy. Squeeze it with all your might, and it becomes as hard as the "black ice" boys who skate know so well. This shows us one of the ways in which ice is formed. It is called "regelation," or freezing together. Take a number of bits of ice in the hand and squeeze them tightly, and in a moment, when you open your hand, they will be found fastened together in a lump. Take two pieces of ice, of any size, and choosing the smoothest sides, press them together, and they will soon freeze and make a solid piece. It makes no difference where the ice is. The two pieces may be swimming in hot water, and yet, if pressed together, they will unite. Put a number of pieces of ice in the hand, close it tightly over them, and plunge the hand into water that is as hot as you can bear, and though they will begin to melt rapidly, they will quickly grow together into an irregular lump. To perform this experiment successfully, you must squeeze the ice tightly and only leave the hand in the hot water for a moment or two.

Fishing for ice is even more entertaining. Fill a bowl with water, and throw in a number of small pieces of ice. Now, to take these out of the water without touching them, take another and larger piece of ice in the hand, and press it firmly against one of the floating pieces, and in a moment the two will freeze together, and with your icy fishhook you can easily pull it out. If the floating pieces slip away from the piece in the hand, drive them into shallow water where they will touch bottom, and give a firm hold while the two pieces freeze together. In this way you can fish out every piece without really touching it with the hand. Boys in the country make snow forts on this principle of regelation. They squeeze the snow into blocks, and then pile one over the other in a wall, and they soon freeze together. It is true the cold helps them to freeze, but, as we have seen in our experiments with the ice in the hot water, it is not this alone, for blocks of ice could be built into a solid wall in midsummer by simply piling one over the other. Go into any icehouse in the summer, and you will find all the cakes of ice fastened together into one great lump as big as the whole house.

A SKIN GAME;

Or, Steve Manley Among the Tanners.

By ALDEN F. BRADSHAW.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Steve Manley, a shrewd and daring young detective on the staff of Chief O'Mara, of the Pennville police department, suspects that a Doctor Gray, and one Meckelburg, are connected with the manufacture of shoes from human skin. Manley discovers Mrs. Bradley wearing a pair of shoes made out of this material, and hears Mrs. Bradley tell Mrs. Markham, who has greatly admired the shoes, that she will phone her when the man from whom she bought the shoes calls at her house, and tell her if he has any more for sale.

CHAPTER III.

STEVE MAKES AN ARREST.

At about ten o'clock on the following Friday morning, Mrs. Emily Markham received a telephone call from her friend Mrs. Bradley, informing her that the shoe peddler was at the latter's residence, and would call at her house a half hour later, if desired.

This was precisely what Mrs. Markham did desire, for she wanted none of the fashionable women of Allegheny to wear ties superior to her own, and she immediately gave instructions to the servant that the young man who would call presently should at once be shown to her boudoir.

These instructions were obeyed in much less than half an hour, however; and the lady, reclining, in partial negligee, in an easy-chair in her elaborate chamber, was greatly surprised on beholding the young man who hurriedly entered.

"Goodness!" she exclaimed, half rising. "Are you the shoe peddler?"

"Der shoe peddler? I should say not, ma'am. I'm der kid as comes in ahead of der fly chap with der shoes."

"Dear me! Aren't you the boy I saw at the ball night before last?"

"I'm der same kid, ma'am, only me togs is different. But I'm on der same lay."

"The same what?" cried Mrs. Markham, quite startled.

"Der same lay. Der skin game," Steve vaguely explained. "I's come here ter give yer a tip, an' ask yer to help me out."

"Dear me!" and the lady began to laugh. "I'm afraid I cannot understand you. Where is the shoe peddler?"

"He's down ter der odder woman's house. I's been piping off der place for near two days now, waiting for his jags to show up. I'd begun ter think he'd flew der coop, but he came up smiling this morning, an' I reckon he'll soon be here. Didn't der woman that had the fly shoes tell yer he was coming?"

"Why, yes, I had such a message. But what do you want of the man?"

"Me and Chief O'Mara wants him the worst way. Yer see, ma'am——"

"Do you mean Chief O'Mara of the police?"

"Sure thing, ma'am. I'm one of der force. See, here's me badge."

"Goodness!" exclaimed Mrs. Markham, now vaguely beginning to take in the possible situation. "Is this peddler a criminal?"

"We suspects he is, ma'am; that's why I'm on der lay here," Steve hurriedly rejoined. "I could had him pinched at der odder woman's house, d'ye see, only she'd made deals with him before, and I wanted ter get on ter just what game der bloke is working. So I says to myself, if der odder woman, that's you, ma'am, will string him along so's I can pipe off what he says, I'll have him dead ter rights. Are yer on?"

Of course, Mrs. Markham looked very much surprised, and not a little dismayed, but the intense earnestness of Steve and the manifest interest he seemed to have at stake, went even farther to influence her to his desire than her vague appreciation of the facts and his asserted association with the police department.

"Do you mean that you want me to receive the man here, and bargain with him, precisely as if nothing had occurred?" she demanded, rising to glance from the window.

"That's just der cheese, ma'am!" cried Steve eagerly.

"But why didn't Chief O'Mara send an officer here?"

"Ain't I an officer?" demanded Steve, with a resentful glare. "Der chief wouldn't take one man off der case and put on another, would he?"

"But you surely cannot arrest this peddler. You're only a boy."

"Is dat so? Well, I've got a copper down below that will pinch him just der second I give him der word. Don't you have any dreams that der shoe man'll get der best of me."

"But of what is he guilty?"

"Der shoes he's selling are made of human skins, ma'am, tanned and——"

"What?" interrupted Mrs. Markham, inexpressibly shocked. "You surely don't mean that!"

"That's der size of it, ma'am, and all we're looking for is der proof."

"My goodness!" exclaimed Mrs. Markham.

"There's a whole gang in der business, ma'am, but we are laying for this one first, for fear he'll jump der town. After we get der shoes and have him in limbo, we're going for der others like a bull at a gate. But it's got to be done on the quiet—see? So's der gang won't git onter it."

"But I cannot lend myself to such an arrest, here in my house!" cried Mrs. Markham.

"Oh, come off der high hoss! Say, youse wouldn't want ter be skinned after you're dead, would yer, and have some bloke selling yer skin to make shoes? Do der square thing. Gimme der chance ter get at der duffer; and say, ma'am, there he comes now! Look at him! Der guy with der little bag. He's coming in the front gate. You let him come up here, and leave me ter——"

"Wait one moment," interposed Mrs. Markham.

She had become quite pale and disturbed, but Steve's argument was too forcible to be resisted, and when she observed from the window the dapper young man to whom he pointed, and thought of the outrage of which he possibly was guilty, she yielded to Steve's request.

Stepping to the head of the stairs, she called down to the servant:

"Show the caller up here, when he rings, Mary."

And the ring sounded almost while she spoke.

"Are you going to remain here?" she cried to Steve, as she returned to the chamber.

"I'll show up in about a minute, ma'am," cried Steve. "And when I come in, you give him der brace that I'm yer son. Are yer on?"

"I think so," gasped Mrs. Markham.

"But yer don't want ter look so white around der gills," Steve hurriedly whispered. "Git a bracer. Pull yerself together. No guy like him oughter jar yer for a minute. I'll not let him hurt yer. He's coming, ma'am. Now, don't youse queer der game!"

Leaving Mrs. Markham more composed, Steve hurriedly slipped out of the room by a rear door, and flew off on a very brief mission of his own.

Just then the shoe peddler appeared at the hall door. He was a slick little fellow, with a sort of a foreign face, as if French or Italian, and was very nicely dressed.

"Mrs. Markham?" he said, bowing on the threshold.

"I'm the lady," was the reply.

She had resumed her seat, and looked decidedly easy and comfortable, as a fashionable lady should.

"You may come in, sir," she added. "I presume you are the man Mrs. Bradley telephoned me about, the one who has shoes to sell?"

"The same, madam," bowed the man, entering and placing a leather satchel on the floor. "She informed me I might find in you a customer."

"Very possibly," said Mrs. Markham indolently. "I'll look at the shoes, if you care to display them."

The peddler bowed obsequiously and dropped to one knee on the floor in front of her, and prepared to open his case.

At the same moment, Steve returned to the room.

The peddler looked up, gave a start of surprise, and seemed about to close the bag. But Mrs. Markham quickly interposed.

"Come in, Johnny," she said, extending her hand to Steve. "This is only my little boy, sir. You needn't mind him."

"Yas, I'm her little boy! Who's der man, ma?" drawled Steve, adding to himself: "Holy smoke, ain't she a peach? Her little boy! Wouldn't that flood yer cellar?"

"He is a gentleman who has some shoes to sell, Johnny, dear," said Mrs. Markham, smiling. "Come here and stand beside me, and don't bother the gentleman."

"Oh, no, I won't do a thing to him," thought Steve.

The peddler felt reassured, and now began showing his goods.

"Mrs. Bradley is a very good customer of mine," he said, looking up, with one of the dainty ties poised in his hand, "and she informed me that I could safely deal with you in a rather confidential way."

"Why in a confidential way, sir?"

"Because this make of shoes, madam, is not on the general market," the peddler explained, in a very smooth way. "They are made in Paris, and are brought into this country only for the purpose of supplying the very best class of ladies."

"Ah, I see! Do you mean that they are smuggled?"

The peddler smiled and shrugged his shoulders.

"You wouldn't expect me to say so, if they were, madam," he rejoined. "And you, of course, would feel quite as easy, providing you bought them, if you were not informed of the precise facts. The shoes are very rare, and can be purchased only in the way mentioned. We are very cautious as to whom we sell them."

"Can't they be bought in the stores?" demanded Steve innocently.

"The stores don't carry such goods as these, my boy."

"Let me take one," said Mrs. Markham.

"I think this is about your size, madam. If you will allow me to fit the other to your foot, you will——"

"Say, ma!" interrupted Steve, taking the shoe from her hand, "ain't der leather soft?"

"Very!"

"It's most as soft as yer skin, ain't it?"

"See here, youngster!" cried the peddler, evidently startled; "look out you don't soil the tie."

"Who's going ter soil it?"

"What is the price of the shoes, sir?"

"We are obliged, because of their quality, to get fifty dollars for them, madam."

"What! Why, that's an awful price."

"It's all on account of the leather, ma!" cried Steve. "Can't you see what kind of leather 'tis?"

"See here, my boy——"

"Oh, you go chase yerself!" Steve sharply interrupted. "I'm onto der leather, an' don't you make no mistake. I saw some just like it at der tannery——"

"Here, give me the shoe!" cried the peddler, now quite pale and excited.

"Aw, forget it!" cried Steve. "I'm onto your curves, ole man! I'm wise ter der kind of goods you're selling. This leather was der skin of a man, an' yer can't fool me with yer smuggling story. If yer——"

But Steve got no further.

The peddler sprang to his feet with a cry of mingled dismay and alarm, and snatched the shoe from Steve's hand and hastened to thrust it back into the bag.

"I didn't come here to be insulted!" he cried, glaring both at Mrs. Markham and Steve. "You'll have to excuse me."

Then he made a dive for the door at the top of his speed.

But he ran straight into the arms of Inspector Garrity, who suddenly appeared upon the threshold of the door.

"Say, youse don't want ter be in a hurry!' cried Steve. "Yer might fall down the stairs. What der yer say, inspector? Ain't this der guy we're after?"

"There's no doubt about that, Steve," laughed the burly detective. "Come, come, my man, shove your hands into these bracelets and keep quiet. We want you at headquarters."

"For what?" demanded the peddler, as white as chalk. "I haven't done anything."

"Well, well, you'll have a chance to tell that to Chief O'Mara," said Garrity curtly. "You must go along with me."

It took but a few minutes to explain the precise situation to Mrs. Markham, and caution her to say nothing about the arrest; and, after having apologized for the intrusion into her house, the three at once made their departure, and entered a carriage awaiting them at the nearest corner.

Half an hour later they arrived in the chief's office at the police headquarters.

Before this, however, the peddler had tumbled to the fact that his arrest was but the first move against the gang with which he was identified; and, except to declare that he himself had made the shoes of leather he had purchased abroad, he refused to open his mouth.

Upon searching him, however, a letter was found, evidently bearing his name, which was Francis Patten, and which read as follows:

"PENNVILLE, Wednesday night.

"MY DEAR PATTEN: I have seen the doctor to-night, and he will try to get the rags for me by the first of the week. Two bundles. It will take a few days to get them in shape, but by next week I will have a few more pairs ready. I am to call on the doctor Saturday night, and then shall learn the precise condition of the rag market. Don't come to my house before the last of next week.

"MECKLEBURG."

"It is very evident that this Meckleburg is the maker of these shoes," said Chief O'Mara, the moment he read the letter. "I will submit the leather to an expert, and if I find the truth to be what we suspect, we will take steps at once to locate this entire gang. Meantime, this fellow's arrest must be kept secret."

That afternoon the suspected fact was established. The shoes undoubtedly were made from tanned human skins. Patten, however, refused to divulge anything concerning his confederates, and the work of locating the parties who provided the bodies, and those guilty of tanning the skins removed from them, was first assigned to Steve Manley, partly because of the success he already had achieved, and partly because the necessary movements were least likely to create suspicion if undertaken by a boy.

CHAPTER IV.

STEVE GETS INTO A BOX.

In the attempt to locate various parties identified with the skin game, Steve Manley knew that he was at odds with men who probably had very little respect for a dead body, and who would put him under the sod in a minute, sooner than suffer exposure and arrest.

But Steve was possessed of mettle not easily daunted, and he went at the work with a will.

At eight o'clock the next evening, that mentioned in Meckleburg's letter to Patten, Steve might have been seen shadowing the Jew through the streets of Pennville and in the direction of Herron Hill.

He followed Meckleburg until the latter entered a single brick house on one of the side avenues, on the door

of which was a polished brass sign bearing the name of Doctor Richard Gray.

"He's der doctor I saw at der ball," Steve instantly decided. "And der Jew has come here to git der two skins, or I'm away off my trolley. I'll see can I get a look into der joint."

The front of the house was in darkness, save a dim light in the hall, and the curtains of a rear-side room, which was the physician's office, were closely drawn.

"They don't give a man half a show," Steve grumbled, standing off to survey the grim dwelling with the eye of a professional cracksman. "There ain't a window, even, what a feller can lift without a derrick. But I have got ter git into der crib. I can't get on to der plant they're putting up by standing out here like a wooden cigar sign. I'll give der back door a try."

But on going to the rear of the house, Steve found himself no better off. Every room was in darkness, and the doors and windows were securely closed.

Back of the house Steve found a deep yard, with a small stable, and the entire place was separated from a narrow back street by a high wooden fence, with pointed nails along the top to prevent scaling.

Evidently the doctor wanted no intruders on his premises, and the back street and yard were enveloped in darkness.

"Well, wouldn't this jar yer?" Steve disgustedly growled, when he found himself utterly unable to effect an entrance.

"Whoever thought those two duffers would have done this ter me? If I was a rube or a jay, 'twould be different. Yer'd kind of expect it. But der idea of their being able ter do it ter me! If I could only get me lamps on 'em, I'd—— Hello, what's der team stopping for?"

A heavy wagon had come to a stop in the narrow back street. It sounded like a dray or a farm wagon. Then Steve heard a deep voice roughly address one of the two horses.

"Stand still, can't yer? D'ye want to wake the whole street? Whoa, now, you brute."

"By der sound of his voice, the guy himself is der biggest brute," said Steve, as he stole hurriedly through the yard to peek through a crack in the fence.

The street was narrow and dark, with only a few scattering houses at one end.

In the gloom outside were the dim outlines of a heavy wagon, with a pair of truck horses attached to it.

Steve could not tell what the wagon contained, yet the faint starlight vaguely revealed a load of some sort, with what appeared to be a covering of something light.

While he still was trying to make out why the driver had stopped there, the man suddenly left the horse at which he was sullenly growling and approached the fence. He was a huge, whiskered fellow, dressed in a truckman's garb, and would have weighed two hundred strong.

The next moment Steve heard the sharp snap of a wire, as when a bell is pulled, and it instantly was followed by a faint ringing of the bell itself, which was evidently in the physician's house.

"Holy smoke!" gasped Steve. "I'm blowed if the blooming farmer ain't coming here with the load. Mebbe it's hay for der doctor's torowbred. I reckon I'd better lay low till the guy has his say. In der ring with a heavyweight like him, I'd be put out in a punch."

Stealing softly along back of the fence, Steve threw himself flat upon the ground behind a corner of the stable, yet within easy view of the house.

He hardly had concealed himself before a broad stream of light shot out across the yard.

A wide door in the rear wall of the house suddenly had been opened, revealing a large, square room within, which appeared to be entirely unfurnished. From this the stream of light came, and two men quickly sprang down to the ground, for the sill of the door was nearly three feet from the earth. Then they hastened toward the back fence.

"Der Jew and der doctor," said Steve to himself. "Hully gee! but der game's opening better'n I thought."

"Mine gracious, dogdor! If he has only got der——"

"Shut up!" sternly commanded Gray, as the two men passed almost within an arm's length of where Steve was lying. "How do you know who may be out there?"

"But it must——"

"Silence!"

"They're mortally afraid of something," thought Steve.

He glanced toward the house. The broad door still was wide open. He was almost tempted to undertake stealing across the yard and slipping in, but it then was so light out there that the chance of escaping detection was too great to be taken.

Then he saw Gray bend closer to the fence.

"Who is there?" he called softly.

"Who the devil do you suppose?" came back the gruff answer.

"That's Meester Foley's voice, dogdor!" cried Meckleburg, joyously rubbing his hands.

"It sounded like it."

"Oh, I know it vos! I'd know it among a tousand—among ten tousand, dogdor!"

"Open the gate," growled Foley, from outside. "D'ye think I want my team standing here till a copper snatches it, and mebbe me along with it?"

But Gray already was engaged in removing a heavy joist from across the broad gate, and presently he swung it open.

"Hello, Foley," he said curtly, on seeing the man's face.

"Hello, yerself. What was the matter with you—asleep? You were a long time getting out here."

"Have you gud 'em, Meester Foley? Tell me der first of all, have you gud 'em?"

"Got 'em?" growled Foley, half raising his heavy whip at the cringing Jew. "Of course I've got 'em. What d'ye suppose I drove away in here for? To exercise my hosses?"

"Shut up, and drive in here!" cried Gray sternly. "Should any one overhear, you'd lay yourself liable. Bring in your team, Foley."

The burly teamster obeyed, and by a dint of growling at and kicking his off horse, he succeeded in entering the yard with his load, and in backing the team close up against the open door of the house.

Meantime, Doctor Gray had again closed and secured the gate.

"What have you brought, Foley?" he demanded, as he hurriedly rejoined them at the door.

"Two boxes and one of the big trunks," replied the truckman, with decidedly grim complacency.

"How many in the trunk?"

"Five of 'em, doctor."

"Only five?"

"That's all there was ripe."

"Der guy must be bringing in a load of melons," thought Steve, crawling out as near as he dared.

"That makes seven in all, then?"

"That's what," nodded the teamster.

"Lend a hand here, Meckleburg, and we will get them unloaded!" Gray cried sharply.

"Not yet, by a long shot!" exclaimed Foley, clambering over the rear wheel to enter the receiving room.

"What do you mean?"

"Trot out yer redeye first, Gray, if it's all the same to you. I'm as dry as a smoked fish."

"Yes, yes, dogdor, let goot Meester Foley vet his vhistle," put in the Jew, who appeared very much elated over the truckman's arrival, and was dancing about with much animation.

"First let Meester Foley vet his vhistle. Then I'll lend bote of my hands, and ve'll unload 'em. I vos so glad der goots has arrived at last."

"Come in, then, and have your drink, and be done with it!" cried Gray, springing up into the room. "And look sharp about it. I want these things gotten under cover, and the sooner it's done, the better. Then I've a word to say in the ears of you two."

Without waiting to explain further, he quickly led the others into an adjoining room, beyond which was the hall of the house. There he produced from a cupboard a bottle and several glasses, and placed them upon the table.

Steve was not slow to avail himself of the slightest opportunity, let the occasion be whatsoever.

"This is der chance I have been looking for," he said to himself, clambering quickly to his feet and hurrying across the yard. "If der sawbones has got something to say to these two duffers, I's got to be where I can take in the merry dialogue. And this is der chance ter get into der theater on a free pass."

But the chance did not prove to be as good as Steve had anticipated.

The voices of the three men in the next room were plainly audible, and to reach undetected the hall beyond was utterly impossible.

Moreover, the room into which Steve now was gazing offered not the slightest concealment. It was a large, square room, nearly as cold and bare as an ice house, with only a number of long shelves on one side, an open sink in one corner, and an ordinary deal-board dissecting table in the middle of the floor.

"Hully gee! this is der doctor's factory!" muttered Steve, hurriedly surveying the place. "And a mouse couldn't hide himself in there."

Then he turned to the team, near which he was standing, and made a hurried examination of that.

It was a heavy farm wagon evidently, and the light cover he previously had observed was only a lot of loose straw.

Thrusting his arm beneath this, Steve quickly felt the outlines of two long boxes. Nearer the rear of the wagon he found, also, the huge trunk, to which the truckman had referred.

"If this was only empty—— Hully gee! 'tain't locked!"

He made the discovery while the thought was running through his mind.

Then he wriggled himself into the team and under the straw, and found that he easily could raise the lid of the trunk.

Feeling into it, he found a layer of straw, which evidently covered something beneath it; but the trunk itself was less than half filled.

"This does settle it, and no mistake! I'll take der chance they don't open it before I can get out and make a sneak. If der trunk goes in, I goes with it, and don't you forget it."

By a bit of worming about, the brave youth effected the move without disturbing the loose straw covering of the teamster's load; and within half a minute he was securely settled in the trunk, with the top down.

Yet he scarce had accomplished the feat when he heard the heavy tread of the three returning men.

They were coming to unload the team.

At the same moment, Steve's hand slid down through the straw in the trunk and came in contact with that portion of the contents which was beneath him.

At first he thought he had touched a piece of ice.

Then he felt hair, as fine as the finest silk, and then a tiny ear—and then he suddenly realized that his hand was in contact with the head of a dead child.

For an instant his blood turned colder than ice itself.

Then he heard the Jew's voice:

"Now, Meester Foley, ve'll help you bring 'em in. It vos vonderful, vonderful, Meester Foley, vat chooze can be made from der hide of a man. So help me gracious, der vimen vos like children with a new toy der moment dey see dem. It's vonderful vat a voman will pay for a thing that she vants. But der chooze is vorth der price, Meester Foley!"

The infernal, mercenary viciousness of the man was sufficient to stir even the vengeful bitterness of a boy.

"I'll round up that ugly guy, or he gets my skin along with der others," said Steve to himself, gritting his teeth. "There is no help for it now. I's got to go in with der poor little kids. Five of 'em! And I thought they was a load of melons! There's no help for it now. But they'll keep still—that's one satisfaction."

TO BE CONTINUED.

STUMBLING UPON GOLD MINES.

Gold was discovered in California in 1848, and in Colorado in 1858. The discovery was accidental in both cases, and the fact created the impression that mines were "lying about loose." Adventurers drifted about in hopes of stumbling upon a mine. Here are some instances of lucky finds.

Three men, while looking for gold in California, discovered the dead body of a man, who evidently had been "prospecting."

"Poor fellow," said one of the trio, "he has passed in his checks."

"Let's give him a decent burial," said another. "Some wife or mother will be glad, if she ever knows it."

They began to dig a grave. Three feet below the surface, they discovered signs of gold. The stranger was buried in another place, and where they had located a grave, they opened a gold mine.

An adventurer, who had drifted to Leadville, awoke one morning without food or money. He went out and shot a deer, which, in its dying agonies, kicked up the dirt and disclosed signs of gold. The poor man staked out a "claim," and opened one of the most profitable mines ever worked in Leadville.

"Dead Man Claim," the name given to another rich mine

in Leadville, was discovered by a broken-down miner while digging a grave.

A miner died when there were several feet of snow on the ground. His comrades laid his body in a snowbank and hired a man to dig a grave. The gravedigger, after three days' absence, was found digging a mine instead of a grave. While excavating, he had struck gold. Forgetting the corpse and his bargain, he thought only of the fact that he had "struck it rich."

An unsuccessful Australian miner went up and down Colorado for several months "prospecting" for gold and finding none. One day he sat down upon a stone, and while musing over his hard luck, aimlessly struck a stone with his pick. He chipped off a piece, and sprang to his feet. The chip was rich with gold quartz.

He hurried into the little town of Rosita, and went to the assay office, where a teamster had just dumped a load of wood. He agreed to saw the wood to pay for assaying his chipped sample. The result of the assay sent him back to his "claim." When he had taken out of it five hundred thousand dollars, he sold the mine for four hundred thousand dollars in cash and one million dollars in stock.

But these "stumblings" are the exception to the rule that mines are found by painstaking, intelligent prospectors. They spend wearisome months in exploring mountains and gulches. They are mineralogists, geologists, and, above all, practical explorers, who can tell from a "twist" in the grain of the rock, or from the color of a spar seam, whether "paying gold" can be mined in the region.

A MURDER MYSTERY.

By LAWRENCE LESLIE.

In 1836 there lived at Fayetteville, North Carolina, a gentleman named James Sheaply, doing a prosperous business as a jeweler. He resided with his mother and a younger brother on a plantation only a mile or so from town.

In a neighboring village resided the family of Samuel Williamson, a planter of moderate means, in whose family were two daughters, both of marriageable age. To the elder of these daughters, Mary, Mr. Sheaply commenced paying his addresses. The young lady had previously been attended by a young merchant, of Fayetteville, named Francis Holcomb, but as Sheaply was considered by her parents a more desirable conquest, Mr. Holcomb was dismissed, and the former soon became Miss Williamson's acknowledged suitor.

Mr. Holcomb seemed to care little for his rejection, and his friendly relations with the other members of the family continued. He and Mr. Sheaply frequently met at Mr. Williamson's house, and an apparently warm and sincere friendship sprang up between them, and they were much together; visiting, hunting, and riding in company whenever it was practicable.

In the autumn of 1836, Mr. Sheaply visited Richmond, on matters connected with his business, and was accompanied by his mother. While they were together making some selections at a wholesale jewelry establishment, the proprietor called Mr. Sheaply's attention to a rare and beautiful watch charm which he had just imported. A part of the jewel consisted of a turtledove, the wings of which were so contrived that when a secret spring was touched they expanded, showing under either a place for a miniature.

At his mother's suggestion, Sheaply purchased the toy, and had his own picture inserted in one of the receptacles, with the design of presenting it to his affianced, Miss Williamson, on the day of their marriage. After spending a few days in Richmond, he took passage with his mother for Charleston. From here they went to Wilmington, where Mrs. Sheaply took stage for home, leaving her son to attend to some important business in that and other towns, to which his mercantile relations extended. The jewel he carried in a morocco case in his pocket, and charged his mother to say nothing of it to the young lady, as he wished to make the presentation a surprise.

It was expected that he would reach home in ten days. A letter was received from him, written four days after, stating the time he expected to arrive at Fayetteville. The time came and passed, but he failed to appear. No alarm was felt, however, as it was concluded that business had unexpectedly detained him. But as day after day went by, and he did not appear, nor write explaining his detention, his friends became uneasy. Finally, the day came when an important suit in which he was interested was to come up for trial, and to meet which he had hurried from Richmond homeward, and he failed to put in an appearance. Then his friends became thoroughly alarmed, and diligent inquiries were instituted.

After a careful search, it was found that he had come as far as a little village called Averysboro, and went gunning with a stranger, which was the last trace of him they could find. A horse which he had hired, his saddlebags, his business papers, and a considerable sum of money, remained at the hotel untouched.

Of course, it was at once suspected that he had been enticed into the woods by the stranger and murdered. Long and careful search failed to discover the body, nor could anything definite be learned concerning his strange companion. Who he was, where he came from, or whither he went, were unsolved riddles, and at length the fruitless effort was abandoned. It soon became settled that Mr Sheaply had been murdered, and after a few months the mystery was forgotten, except by his immediatte friends.

By his mother and Miss Williamson he was mourned with a sorrow which it seemed time even could not soften. The former regarded the latter as her widowed daughter, and cared for her with a mother's tenderness and solicitude, keeping her under her own roof for nearly a year after her son's disappearance.

Mr. Holcomb did not neglect them in their affliction, but by his kind attention, valuable counsel, and apparently unselfish devotion to their interests, won their highest respect and gratitude.

About two years after the disappearance of Mr. Sheaply, Miss Williamson's family removed to Charleston, South Carolina, where Mr. Holcomb and Mr. Williamson had formed a partnership for carrying on a mercantile business.

After the removal to Charleston, Mr. Holcomb became more marked in his attentions to Miss Williamson, and in two or three years it came to be understood between them that the old friendship would be renewed.

About this time her health began to fail, and she became a confirmed invalid.

In 1841 some workmen engaged in cutting timber in the woods near Averysboro, while passing through a dense

thicket, came upon a bleached human skeleton, which, from the remnants of clothing, peculiarities of teeth, and malformation of the right foot, proved to be the remains of Mr. Sheaply. Two bullet holes in the skull left no doubt of the cause of death; but who the assassin was remained a mystery.

This discovery caused the bereaved mother to feel again the poignancy of her first sorrow, and while she was thus mourning, she received a letter from Miss Williamson's friends, stating that her health was very poor and rapidly declining. Wishing to see her once more, and enjoy the melancholy pleasure of talking over the past, so full of mystery, disappointment, and death, Mrs. Sheaply immediately took stage for Charleston.

On her arrival at Mr. Williamson's she found her young friend no better. There was very little said at the first interview on the subject uppermost in the heart of each, but feeling stronger the next day, Miss Williamson desired to be dressed, and sent for Mrs. Sheaply.

The latter had scarcely entered the room and commenced the conversation, when her attention was attracted to a peculiar charm attached to the young lady's watch chain. The first glance at it brought the pallor of death to her face, and bending over in breathless horror, she looked at it more closely, and then suddenly uttered a piercing shriek, which alarmed the whole house and brought them into the room. Miss Williamson swooned, but soon recovered, and everybody excitedly asked the cause of the outcry.

"Where did you get that jewel?" Mrs. Sheaply demanded, half crazed with her excitement. "Where did you obtain that?"

Fearing that the woman was growing mad with grief, they attempted to calm her, and finally gently endeavored to take her from the room. But she stoutly resisted, and again and again demanded how the jewel was obtained.

"That charm!" she shrieked, "was in my murdered son's pocket; he bought it to give you on your wedding day!"

This was looked upon as conclusive evidence of her insanity, and they again attempted to take her from the room, and began to reason with her as to the impossibility of such a thing.

"See here!" she exclaimed, breaking away from them, and taking the jewel in her hand. "See! here is the proof!" and touching the secret spring, the wings of the dove were raised, and the miniature portrait of the murdered man appeared, like an apparition from the grave.

They all gazed on it with horror, and the sight proved too much for Miss Williamson, who gave a sharp cry and sank back upon the sofa—a corpse.

Her tragic death silenced for the present all further inquiries concerning the discovered jewel; but when the burial was over the subject was resumed. Miss Williamson's sister declared that the jewel was a gift from Mr. Holcomb more than a year previous. He was therefore sent for, the open jewel shown him, and he was asked how and where he obtained it. He looked at it, and declared he had never seen it before. At this declaration the family all looked at him in bewilderment, for it was known to them all that it had been presented by him.

"How dare you say that!" exclaimed the sister, in great indignation. "I saw you give it to my sister myself!"

At this Mr. Holcomb looked at it again, and said smilingly:

"Oh, yes, I recollect now; I did give it to Miss Williamson, but being open so changed its appearance that I did not recognize it."

Its history was then explained, and he was asked where and how he obtained it. At first he hesitated, pleading a faulty memory, but soon recovered himself, and gave the name of a well-known peddler and suspected smuggler, as the person of whom it was obtained.

At this point the matter was put into the hands of the officers of the law, and after a few days' search, the peddler was found and placed under arrest. The day of examination was fixed, and Holcomb notified to appear.

The court assembled and took up the case, but Mr. Holcomb did not appear. After waiting some time, an officer was sent to his place of business to request his attendance. He was informed at the store that Holcomb had not yet made his appearance that morning, and advised him to call at his room. On going thither the officer found the door locked, but on looking through the keyhole it was seen that the occupant was lying on the bed, his feet and the lower part of his legs being in view. Loud calls were made, but no answer could be obtained, and finally, thoroughly alarmed, they forced open the door.

The sight that then greeted them was appalling. There lay Mr. Holcomb on his bed, dead, with his eyes glaring wide, his countenance distorted by the agony of death, and a small vial standing on the table, labeled "Arsenic." The unhappy man had committed suicide. The peddler, of course, was discharged.

A mystery still hangs over this affair. Was Holcomb the real assassin? Was he the stranger who met Sheaply at Averysboro? Did he kill him, take the jewel from his person, and subsequently present it to Miss Williamson, and if so, what was the motive for the crime, and did he kill himself to avoid exposure?

On the other hand, was he innocent? Did he really purchase the article of the peddler, and was he driven to suicide by fear and mortification?

These are secrets that the grave now hides, and this solution is beyond mortal ken. The Fayetteville murder mystery of 1836 is a murder mystery still.

A QUEER PEOPLE.

The Chinese do everything backward. Their compass points to the south instead of the north. The men wear skirts and the women trousers; while the men wear their hair long, the women coil theirs in a knot. The dressmakers are men; the women carry burdens.

The spoken language is not written, and the written language is not spoken. Books are read backward, and any notes are inserted at the top. White is used for mourning, and bridesmaids wear black—instead of being maidens, these functionaries are old women.

The Chinese surname comes first, and they shake their own hands instead of the hands of one whom they would greet.

Vessels are launched sideways, and horses are mounted from the off side.

They commence their dinner with dessert, and end up with soup and fish.

In shaving, the barber operates on the head, cutting the hair upward, then downward, and then polishes it off with a small knife, which is passed over the eyebrows and into the nose to remove any superfluous hairs.

THE NEWS OF ALL NATIONS.

History of Seal Full of Romance.

The history of the seal is one of the most absorbing and romantic of all the great American industries. While the United States government has produced wonderfully interesting books on the subject, which can be had free of charge, the whole country will be interested in a few facts bearing on the seal history of North America, especially in the light of the recent action of the department of commerce, which stamps St. Louis as the fur center of the world.

The price paid to Russia for the whole of Alaska was $7,000,000. The revenue from the seal islands alone—rough, barren, forbidding spots that comprise but an infinitesimal area of the Alaska map, has been $15,000,000—more than twice the sum paid for the entire territory.

This area comprises the Pribilof Islands, discovered in 1786 by the Russian navigator whose name the islands bear. It is the seat of the most important fur-seal colony in the world. Next in importance is the Commander herd, owned by Russia, while the Kuril herd, owned by Japan, comes third. During the first year of Uncle Sam's possession, the catch was about 200,000 to 300,000 seals, but the herd has diminished so considerably that, as a result, laws have been enacted by which the herds will be conserved and future catches increased.

This great diminution of the herds has been the result of pelagic sealing—the killing of seals in the open sea. Whole fleets would sometimes lay off the seal islands, while their crews killed the female seals which swam out to sea seeking food.

At sea, the sexes cannot be distinguished, and the females predominating, the pelagic catch is made up largely of this class, the percentage being from 85 to 95 per cent of females. The death of a female seal was not the only evil. She was out seeking food for her pup, which she had left on shore, so that her death meant, also, the death of the young one.

The United States, Russia, Japan, and Great Britain have made a pact which stipulates that no longer shall the fur seal be killed on the high seas.

The seal is a polygamist. The larger and stronger males have harems, ranging from 20 to 40 in number, according to the fighting strength of the "King of the Harem." One bull has been known to have 200 cows in his harem.

Naturally there is a large surplus of mateless males, whose one object in life is to get a harem of their own, entailing continuous warfare and bloodshed, in which, often, the female is torn to pieces or maimed in the struggle for ownership. To kill off a goodly number of these disturbing bachelors of the herd is, therefore, necessary—not only for the good of the herd itself, but also for the good of the skins, for, naturally, a mutilated skin or an old one has but very little market value.

Nearly two years ago Congress made a law stopping the killing of seals entirely on United States islands for five years, except seals needed for food by natives on the islands. While from the usual standpoint of game preservation, this seemed a good thing, zoölogists and experts on seal life are not in favor of it.

They say that the ruling regarding the preservation of deer or grouse does not apply to the seal. They claim that if the number of male seals is not kept down, they will continue to fight and kill each other, and the pups and females of the harem as well—that only a small percentage of male seals is needed to increase the herd. But, besides this, if the killing is closed for five years, thousands of skins will be lost, because a skin older than four years and a half is worthless. Scientific men say that killing, rightly governed, with none on the open sea, will mean a quick growth of the herd.

However, Congress decided the other way, and closed the season for five years. The skins of the several thousand seals killed under the law as food for natives are not to be sent to London, as formerly. Secretary Redfield has ordered otherwise. After a thorough investigation, he has ordered that the entire quantity be sold in the United States.

Burglary a "Lost Art."

"Scientific burglary absolutely does not exist," is the remarkable pronouncement just issued by Xavier Guichard, formerly head of the Paris detective department, who has been interviewed on the subject by Richard Arapu, a leading criminologist.

Guichard, whose name became a household word throughout the world last year in connection with automobile bandits, declares that the figure of the twentieth-century burglar, who goes about his work armed with all the resources that latest discoveries in science afford, is merely a joke invented by American and European writers.

"The truth is quite different," said M. Guichard. "Take, for instance, the famous oxyhydrogen blowpipe, which is supposed to be generally used now to melt away the locks of safes. In all my experience I came upon two cases only where this method was used, and one of them was a jeweler, who robbed himself for insurance. He used the blowpipe because he had read about it in novels. The other case, strangely enough, was in a remote province.

"As to dynamite, its use is very rare, and generally futile, as the explosion, instead of blowing out the lock, jams it harder than ever. What people don't realize is that burglars belong to an inferior grade of humanity, and are seldom at all intelligent.

"The majority don't even believe in finger-print identification, and don't take the slightest precaution. Yet it is by the finger prints that we make the great bulk of arrests. The chance of making a mistake where all ten fingers are represented is one in 4,000,000."

Earns Living by Foiling Swindlers.

There's a detective at the East Fifty-first Street station, in New York, who saves, on the average, one "easy mark" from the professional coin matchers and sure-thing men every day. He is John Barron, about thirty, pleasant to look at, and pleasant to talk to. They say that Barron knows every coin flipper in the Tenderloin district.

A gang of about fifty crooks, coin matchers, lemon-pool experts, card players, and everything else but moralists, has a corner on the skinning games in the district that lies in the Forty streets, around the Grand Central Ter-

minal and Times Square. The headquarters are in a billiard room above a cigar store in Broadway.

This gang has an organization that would make the United States Steel Corporation sit up and take notice. If one of its number falls into the clutches of Barron, he gets a messenger boy and sends an S O S signal to headquarters. Pretty soon around comes a suave individual with a roll of $1,000 bills, who furnishes bail.

The delay of law, the anxiety of men who have been fleeced to get out of town and home again, and one thing and another of that sort make it nearly impossible to have any of this gang convicted. But Barron has ideas. He has a punch, and a kick, too.

He doesn't try to arrest these men. He simply hangs around, and when one of them appears with an easy mark, he walks up and says:

"Pardner, do you know that's a crook you're talking to?"

The easy mark, and very often he isn't such an easy mark, either, for these professionals are good at their business, is naturally surprised. The chances are that he has found his companion a pleasant sort and a good talker. Generally he turns on Barron with a flash of resentment, and asks:

"Who the blank are you?"

Now, Barron has a sense of humor, so he keeps his coat over his badge, and remarks:

"Never mind who I am. If you don't believe what I'm saying, ask the man himself."

Such baldness of statement never fails.

"Sure, I am," comes back the crook, for he knows Barron, and knows the game is all up.

"Well, I'll be——"

"Now, just wait a minute," cuts in Barron, with a smile; "ask this crook if I didn't arrest him for matching coins last week."

"How about it?" asks the stranger.

"That's right, bo; so long." And with that, the crook "beats it," as he himself later explains to his pals, and the tourist turns to Barron with an outstretched hand.

It sounds simple, this saving unsuspecting visitors from the coin-matching gang, but it isn't. Barron has been studying the art for two years, and he's not naturally slow. Even now, he can't keep the gang from prospering.

Every New Yorker who knows anything at all about his city knows that these crooks are about town. Every New Yorker also thinks that he couldn't be fleeced by one of the gentlemen, but listen:

Only the other day Barron spotted two of the gang with a middle-aged man in Fifth Avenue. Now, it happened that Barron wanted to "get" these particular men, if possible, so he took a chance. He jumped into a passing taxi and followed slowly. They strolled up the avenue and turned into a hotel. Barron cooled his heels outside for a few minutes, and then went into the bar.

The trio were matching quarters for paper dollars, and the innocent one had already lost seventy. The two crooks were arrested on a charge of disorderly conduct, and were later convicted and sent to Blackwell's Island for six months.

The conviction was secured because the complainant was a resident of the city and didn't want to hurry to some other town. Barron says that he can generally persuade an out-of-town complainant to wait over for the hearing before a police magistrate, which doesn't take more than twelve hours. After that, however, the job is almost hopeless. If the guilty ones are convicted in the police court, they appeal, and that takes time. When the case comes up, the complainant has run out of time and money, and has gone home.

Trains to Run on Cable.

An extraordinary railroad is to run from Chamonix, in France, up the Aiguille du Midi, a precipitous needle rising 12,608 feet. Its object is to show tourists the unmatched glories of Mont Blanc and its chain of peaks and glaciers.

Instead of running on solid ground, however, like most of the Swiss mountain railroads, it is to go through the air on pylons and cables, swinging from peak to peak, far above the eternal snows and glaciers. The idea of constructing this railroad originated in the brain of Fidele Eugster, a Swiss, living at Dijon, France, who is supplying the necessary funds for its construction. One million, two hundred thousand dollars has been raised.

The starting station of the line is situated down in the valley of Chamonix. To reach the power station above, where the traction cables are set in motion by 75-horsepower electric motors, passengers ride in suspended cars with a seating capacity of 20 persons over 6,562 feet of cable suspended by 27 pylons. This power station, near Pierre Pointue on the Alpinists' route up Mont Blanc, is at an altitude of more than a mile. From the power station to the third station, just under the shadow of the Aiguille du Midi, is a second series of 24 pylons. The cable between these two stations is 4,593 feet long.

The view at this height is superb. Chamonix is nearly one mile below, and from here one gets a good idea of the majesty of the Chamonix aiguilles, such as the Aiguille du Plan, the Blatierer, and the Charmoz.

At this station one changes cars, and the system of transportation changes also. It is just as well, too, for the ascent has been so rapid and the change in the density of the air so great, as to be uncomfortable to people with weak hearts. At station three, therefore, one may rest and get his breath, for the most sensational is yet to come. From now on one swings through the air.

The cars used on this last section are smaller, accommodating only 16 persons. They are more like a basket.

The fourth station, altitude 9,383 feet, is situated on a pinnacle of granite almost opposite the Grands Mulets, and passengers stopping here will get an idea of what real climbing is, for climbers still do the Aiguille du Midi from this face. This station, however, is little more than a relay, for the object point is the Col du Midi, 11,647 feet above the sea. To swing from the fourth station to the summit of the Col is impossible in one swoop, so halfway, on a projecting pinnacle of granite, the engineers are placing a tension pylon to relieve the strain. To this tension pylon, however, is an unbroken swoop of one-half mile, and from the tension pylon to the summit, another shoot of 1,837 feet. The angle which the line takes varies from 15 to 48 degrees.

Old Crew for the Oregon.

Fifty San Francisco men, veterans of the war with Spain, who served aboard the old battleship *Oregon* when she made her famous run from the Pacific coast to take part in the destruction of the Spanish squadron at Santiago, have petitioned the secretary of the navy to be permitted to reënlist for three months and help man the battleship when

she leads the international fleet through the Panama Canal in 1915.

As Congress stipulates the term of enlistment shall be four years, it hardly would be possible to allow the old tars to reënlist for a shorter period, but Secretary Daniels is already considering a plan to invite as many of the old officers and men of the *Oregon* as he can assemble to make the trip. Rear Admiral Clark, the *Oregon's* commander on her historic trip around the Horn, will be at his old post on the bridge.

Eskimos Profit by Parcel Post.

According to advices received at Washington, the price of a white-fox skin among Eskimos in northern Alaska has jumped from $2 to more than $20 in the last few months. The natives have learned that they do not need to sell the skins to the fur traders, but that by means of the parcel post, they can send them direct to the United States, and thus avoid the middle men.

Nine Children Aid Farmer.

John Nelson, farming fourteen miles northeast of Walhalla, N. D., recently completed harvesting 640 acres of grain, of which all of the work was done by his own sons and daughters, and he expects to do threshing operations entirely by his family.

Five sons and four daughters are all expert farm workers. During operations the girls ran binders, while their brothers shocked the grain.

In threshing operations, girls will drive bundle wagons.

Seeking Trace of Long-lost Family.

After more than a score of years of gossip, theorizing, and discussion, officials of Caldwell County, Missouri, are to take steps to ascertain what has become of the McMillan family—"the disappearing family," as it is known—in order that some disposition may be made of town and farm property, uncared for, rents uncollected, and taxes unpaid, for almost a quarter of a century.

James McMillan, prominent attorney, serving his third term as probate judge of Caldwell County, and head of this mysterious family, was the first to drop from sight. Leaving the county courthouse one evening, he paused on the steps a moment to shake hands with Thomas Laidlow, his best friend.

"I think I'll go back to the old home in Scotland soon," laughingly declared Judge McMillan. "It's been a long time since I was there, and I believe I'm getting homesick, and at my age, too."

He and Laidlow parted, and McMillan was never seen again. So far as can be learned, he did not go home that night, and did not take a train at the nearest railroad station, ten miles away; he did not leave Kingston in any vehicle.

Judge McMillan was then between fifty and fifty-five years of age. He had lived in the county twenty-seven years, fifteen of which had been spent as a public official. He had a lucrative law practice, owned two good cottages in town, a farm just outside the limits, and had money in a safety-deposit vault at a local bank. He had no debts and no enemies.

Mrs. McMillan and their five children remained on the farm. The property was in the wife's name, and in the safety-deposit box was found several thousand dollars. Mrs. McMillan received no word from her husband. Messages sent to the district in Scotland from which McMillan and his wife had originally come brought back the answer that the judge had not been there, that no word had been received from him.

Two months after Judge McMillan disappeared, a probate judge was named to serve out his term. His accounts were found correct to the penny.

Three years after their father's disappearance, James and George, two of his sons, came to town one day, loafed about their usual haunts for a while, then, like their father, disappeared. They had brought no luggage with them, and had not worn their good clothes. No word was ever received from either them or their father. The mother and three girls still lived on the farm.

Two years after the boys dropped from sight, bills were distributed announcing a sale of the McMillan goods. The terms were cash only. The sale was held, and the next day mother and daughters left town.

Not a clew to what has become of the family has ever been received here. The cottages in town are always occupied. Tenants move in and stay until they get ready to leave town. They pay no rent, have no landlord to contend with. When it becomes known that a tenant is to leave, there is a rush to succeed him. A departing tenant, loading his goods at the front door, sees another unloading other goods at the back door.

Years after the McMillan family left, a negro preacher and his family took up their abode in the deserted farmhouse. They left in terror two days later. Ghosts were there, they asserted. Three other families moved in at various times, and left just as abruptly. The house is tenantless now. Boys knocked out all the window glass long ago. Tramps boarded up the windows, but even they ceased long ago to use the house as a refuge. It is shunned by all who pass.

Caldwell County officials will make an effort to locate the McMillans in order that some disposition may be made of the property so strangely left behind. If the mystery is not solved, an application will be made in court to declare the McMillans legally dead, in order that the property may be sold and the accumulated taxes of years paid into the county treasury. The rest of the money will be turned over to the State.

Cures Ankle by Running from Bees.

Thirty-one years to the day after he had crippled his ankle, William Kurtz, farmer, fell while running from bumble bees and gave the ankle a twist. The ankle was cured.

A Sneeze May Kill Her.

A sneeze, a cough, or a laugh may cost the life of Mrs. Mary McCormick, a patient at the Boston City Hospital, physicians say. The woman suffered a broken back in a fall from a third-story window, and any movement, however slight, may snap the weakened spinal cord.

Thomas Wilson is held in bonds of $5,000 pending her recovery or death. The police charge him with having thrown the woman from the window.

Car Deserts Train; Unnoticed by Crew.

Conductor C. H. Breazle, of the Santa Fe Railroad, reports an extraordinary accident to his train. While the train was running between Cleburne and Clifton, Texas, an oil-tank car in the center suddenly became loose and

jumped the track, cutting air connection and automatically setting the brakes.

The car fell into the ditch, while the one behind moved on and was coupled to the one in front without loss of any time.

The tank car was not missed until the train was being checked up a great distance beyond the point where the accident happened.

Arctic Seas Navigable.

Doctor Nansen, who arrived at St. Petersburg, Russia, recently, expressed himself assured of the commercial possibility of regular traffic through the arctic seas during one month in the year. His own trip, just completed, occupied twenty-one days, and no real difficulties were encountered.

Doctor Nansen says the best period is the month of September.

The success of the famous explorer has revived the hopes originally entertained when the English pioneer, Wigging, was making his annual expeditions across the Kara Sea, which were finally abandoned fifteen years ago.

Boy Somnambulist Falls Fifty Feet; Dying.

Fourteen-year-old Curtis Variell, of Waterbury, Conn., a pupil at the Taft School, in Watertown, fell 50 feet from a fire escape while walking in his sleep, and is at the point of death.

Wallace Back from Labrador.

Dillon Wallace, the arctic explorer, who was recently given up for lost by his friends, arrived in New York recently on the Red Cross steamship *Stephano*, from his trip to Labrador. He had gone to place a bronze tablet at the headwaters of the Susan River, where his companion, Leonidas Hubbard, junior, died of starvation ten years ago. He succeeded in finding the camp, but could not erect the tablet, as it had fallen out of the canoe to the bottom of the Beaver River.

Mr. Wallace left New York on June 21st with Judge William H. Malone, of Bristol, Conn., and went to Rigolet, Labrador, and from that point the expedition set out on July 5th. With them went Gilbert Blake, a half-breed hunter, who had accompanied Hubbard and Wallace on their former journey, and after their provisions had given out and Hubbard had died, had saved Wallace at his last gasp.

When the expedition started from Rigolet on July 5th, it consisted of two canoes, with Judge Malone, Wallace, and Blake in the leading one, and two half-breeds with the camp outfit and provisions in the second. Two days up the Beaver River, the second canoe was smashed, and the stores had to be cached.

Leaving the two men in charge of them, Wallace, with Judge Malone and Blake, went up the river in their canoe. After another day's journey, that also collapsed, and the bronze tablet sank to the bottom of the Beaver River, where it was impossible to recover it, on account of the current.

"You can judge how swift the current was," said Mr. Wallace, "when I tell you that a fifty-pound sack of flour was carried half a mile on the crest of a wave before it sank."

After that the three men walked thirty miles in two days to the spot where Hubbard had died ten years before. The camp was just as it had been left, and lying all around it was the litter of old cans, rags, and empty boxes thrown away by Blake when he started back with Wallace.

"As we had lost the tablet," said the explorer, "we took the chisels that had been brought for fixing it to the rock and chiseled out this inscription:

"'Leonidas Hubbard, junior, intrepid explorer and practical Christian, died here October 18, 1903.'

"Below this we chiseled the words, 'John 14, verse 4.'

"Among the baggage was some red cement, which we mixed with grease and rubbed into the letters to make them more distinct, and we used some of the long, rough hair from Blake's head to make a brush to lay the mixture on with.

"After two days' walking we got back to the cache, where the man had repaired the damaged canoe. We tried to let it drift down the river with the camp outfit, but the rope broke and the canoe was smashed again, so we had to walk forty miles to Grand Lake, where Judge Malone left me to return home, and I went down north."

Mr. Wallace said that Grand Lake was, in his opinion, 1,000 feet deep, as he had sounded with a 92-fathom lead line and got no bottom. It was fifty miles long, and five rivers, the Nascaupee, the Crooked, the Susan, the Beaver, and the Cape Carvo, emptied themselves into it.

He was very much surprised, he said, to hear in August, when he went to St. John's, Newfoundland, that he had been reported lost.

"I went down north to Davis Land," said the arctic explorer, "where I saw the wild geese in thousands. I stopped at an Esquimo village called Narpartuk, and on my second day there a tragedy occurred.

"An elderly man named Korah had arrived there the previous day with his sixteen-year-old son, Jonas, and a boy friend of the same age called Metcalf. Korah came ashore to sleep at the house of a friend and left the two boys in the canoe. The next morning, when he went down to the beach, he saw a big polar bear standing over the half-eaten body of his son. Metcalf, the other boy, had run for his life when the bear began to eat his companion.

"The Eskimos went after the bear and killed it. When its body was examined, it was found to be half starved. Its attack on Jonas created great surprise, as no one could remember a polar bear being driven by hunger to come down to a village and kill any one to eat."

Allen Ward Berdsall, who had been up to Baffin Land to take moving pictures, returned on the same steamer, after several exciting adventures. On one of his expeditions off Greenland, he went in a small schooner to get a moving picture of a giant iceberg, a mile and a half long and 600 feet high. As he was taking it, the iceberg broke in two and nearly swamped his vessel with the swell it raised.

Mystery in Flight of Birds Revealed.

Birds are poor judges of weather, according to naturalists who have been studying the question. The popular notion that the early flight of birds to the South indicates the speedy approach of winter is incorrect, in the opinion of investigators in the employ of the government, who have gone over records of observation covering a period of twenty-five years in the United States and Canada.

Millions of birds, of more than 250 species, fly from north to south at the end of summer. Many of the Northern birds go to Mexico, some species penetrate forests and valleys of Central America, while others, like the swallows,

fly on tireless wing as far as Brazil and Argentina. The migrations, according to the species and habits of the birds, are by easy stages, with flight by night over a distance of twenty or thirty miles, resting and feeding by day, or by long periods on the wing, covering day and night, and carrying the flyers over spaces reckoned in thousands of miles.

In explaining the mystery in the sudden departure of the feathered tribes from the North and their return in the spring, the scientists say the flights are not regulated by weather conditions or lack of food. It is a well-known fact that the southward flight of most birds takes place at a time when weather conditions are favorable for their comfort, and the food supply is most abundant. Having reared their young and taught them to fly, and having molted and put on winter feathers, the restive birds start southward long before frosty nights or frozen lakes and rivers make such flight necessary. In like manner, the return journey begins at a time before the northern woods and fields are suited to the purposes for which the birds go North.

Robins and bluebirds, blackbirds and the meadow lark, the killdeer, and the heron are among the early arrivals, and they often appear on sunny slopes in the southern side of forests before the snow has completely gone, when they must seek the friendly shelter of evergreens and the densest thickets as a protection from the rigors of the cold nights.

Besides, the birds arrive at their destination often during heavy storms, which they would naturally avoid if they were gifted with any such instinctive wisdom as has been attributed to them in popular belief.

The purpose of the government investigation was to ascertain the times and manner of bird migration, whether they were governed by storm or other meteorological condition, and such other facts as might be revealed.

The conclusions reached were that birds nest in succeeding years at or near the places where they were hatched; that they go south in autumn, pass the winter there, and return to the same localities in spring, the female birds often bringing a different mate. The autumn and spring migrations are fixed by the molting periods of the birds and not by the weather.

Find Ship Lost Seven Years.

After seven years, the recorder of missing ships at last is able to make final entry of the tragic end of the Charles Nelson Company steamer *Centennial*, which sailed for San Francisco from Japan in 1906 with a cargo of sulphur and a crew of thirty men.

The ship has been found by Russian explorers off Saghalin Island, in the desolate Okhotsh Sea, shrouded in ice.

Word of the discovery came from Captain E. Hieber, pilot of the Russian expedition.

Judging from all indications, the crew of the *Centennial* left their ice-immured vessel in the lifeboats and perished.

Maniac's Shot Cost $9,000.

Release of an insane-asylum patient on parole renders the asylum superintendent and relatives of the paroled patient accountable, under the law, for the conduct of their ward, according to a verdict returned in the superior court at Tacoma, Wash.

O. W. Pence, paroled by Superintendent A. P. Calhoun, of the Western Washington Hospital for the Insane, on the promise of A. J. Littlejohn and wife, of Portland, that they would care for him, had shot and seriously wounded H. P. Emery, a Portland theatrical man. The court awarded Emery $9,000 damages against Doctor Calhoun and the Littlejohns.

Heaters to Protect Fruit.

Citrus fruit growers of southern California are taking steps to safeguard their crops this winter by artificial heating on a vast scale. Huge steel tanks, with an average capacity of 100,000 gallons of crude oil or distillate, are being built in the orchard districts. In these tanks the fuel oil will be stored, ready for instant use.

More than 1,000,000 oil heaters have been bought in the East, and many are being made in Los Angeles.

Would Raise Army to Total of 115,000.

In advocating an army of 115,000 men, *The Infantry Journal* says that this would permit the formation within the United States of a mobile army of three infantry divisions of twenty-seven regiments, one cavalry division of twelve regiments, and seven regiments of field artillery.

This increase also contemplates increasing the number of men in the infantry companies in time of peace from 65 to 100. It is asserted that in periods of emergency, when companies are raised to the war strength of 150 men, the addition of so many untrained men destroys the efficiency of the troops and prevents their prompt employment just when they are most needed. Moreover, the smaller number prevents the proper training of men and officers.

On the basis of the proposed increase, the mobile army, exclusive of the coast artillery and troops serving beyond seas, would consist of 33,000 infantry, 12,000 cavalry, 5,400 field artillery, 2,200 auxiliary troops, a total of 54,600 men, or an enlisted man to every 1,700 population. *The Infantry Journal* shows that the strength of mobile armies in other countries, compared to the population, is as follows:

Great Britain, one to every 205; Germany, one to every 70; France, one to every 50; Russia, one to every 190; Japan, one to every 130.

"Would a mobile army in the United States of 54,600 men in time of peace be considered, in any sense, a large standing army?" asks *The Journal*.

As showing the necessity for the increase asked for, it says.

"Prior to the Spanish-American War, we maintained an army of 25,000 men, consisting of 25 regiments of infantry, 10 of cavalry, and 7 of coast artillery. Of these, the mobile army consisted of about 20,000 men. The outbreak of the war with Spain found this force so badly organized and numerically so weak as to be ineffective, and as a consequence, in April, just before the declaration of war, legislation was hastily enacted by Congress to reorganize and increase it. We were not prepared, and we paid the cost. Are we in any way relatively more ready than we were in 1898?

"At the close of the Spanish-American War and the Philippine insurrection, the army consisted of 30 regiments of infantry, 15 of cavalry, 6 of field artillery, a coast artillery corps, and certain special troops.

"This force at present amounts to about 90,000 men, of which the infantry, cavalry, and field artillery constitute the mobile army; in other words, that part of the army

on which the country depends for field operations. The authorized strength of the mobile army to-day is 53,708 men. Of this number, about 21,000 are stationed outside of the United States, leaving about 33,000 available for defense or offense. This force will, on the completion of our foreign garrisons, be still further reduced, so that ultimately there will remain available in the United States a field force of about 25,000 men—a number no greater than was found insufficient in 1898—with which to carry out the more complicated domestic and foreign policies resulting from our recent wars.

"Not only is our available army relatively weaker, but, again, it is badly organized. Again, in event of war, would hasty legislation and rapid expansion be necessary, and again would delay, inefficiency, unnecessary death, and excessive cost result."

Items from Everywhere.

Scientists have found fifty-six areas in the oceans where the water is more than three miles deep, ten where it is more than four miles deep, and four where the depth is greater than five miles.

What is thought to be the largest one-piece flagpole in the world is in Vancouver, B. C. It is 200 feet long, weighs five tons dressed, and after being seasoned six months, was erected in a solid foundation ten feet deep.

The oldest university in the world is in Peking, China. A granite register consisting of 320 stone columns contains the names of 60,000 graduates.

The sky reflection of the lights of London has been seen, in favorable weather, fifty miles distant.

Lynn H. First is postmaster at Henry's Bend, Pa., and cannot get rid of his office, although he wishes to do so. Henry's Bend is a summer resort, and the postmaster is the only permanent resident.

'Twill be a Mild Winter.

It's going to be a mild winter, according to Michael Quann, director of the zoo at Madison, Wis. He says the bears, wolves, raccoons, foxes, and deer have not taken on their customary fur coats.

Met Russian Explorers.

Captain F. E. Kleinschmidt, an explorer, returned recently from eastern Siberia, where he obtained 4,000 specimens of bird and animal life for the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh. He and his party met, off the east coast of Siberia, on July 19th, the Russian polar expedition, which has since reported the discovery of a new continent.

The captain, accompanied by Marshall Scull and A. M. Collins, of Philadelphia, and Doctor Arthur Elting, of Albany, left Seattle on May 4th and cruised along the Alaskan coast in the schooner *Abler* to within a thousand miles of the pole.

Captain Kleinschmidt's diary tells of meeting the Russian expedition. The explorers were entertained by the Russian officers while they were at Wrangle Island, where the ice breakers *Taimyr* and *Vaigatch* stopped for coal before making the final dash through the Northwest Passage. On July 19 the captain was invited to dinner by Commander Wilkitsky and General Sargolof. His diary gives this account of the feast:

"I had the seat of honor next to the general and captain. The captain spoke broken English and the general nothing but Russian, so the conversation did not flow quite freely. We had an enormous dinner, including frankfurters, sauerkraut, chicken, vegetables, ice cream, vodka, Maderia, and several other kinds of wines. The officers were very cordial and gave us free access to the coast.

"After dinner Baron von Heinifer Huhn came on board, all dressed in white. It was very strange to see a man dressed as though for a tropical climate way up in the arctic. A little later six of the other officers arrived and we showed them the pictures of my former hunts and trophies of the hunt."

Captain Kleinschmidt and his party saw the two iceboats depart. They proceeded upon their course ten miles apart and in constant wireless communication. Captain Kleinschmidt returned to Seattle on May 3. One of the most exciting incidents of the trip was the roping of a live polar bear from the deck of the schooner. In addition to the polar bear, the members of the expedition brought back a live walrus. They are now in Woodland Park, Seattle.

Saved from Grave by Flutter of Eye.

A "dead wagon" backed up to the door of the home of Francisco Conastilla, on Naco Road, Bisbee, Ariz., recently, and an undertaker got down to get the body of the man. Just as he was about to pick it up, with the assistance of others in the room, Conastilla's right eyelid fluttered a moment, and then both eyes opened in a wide stare of terror. The undertaker looked around and found himself alone. A colored man and six Mexicans who had been in the room had left abruptly at the first flutter of that right eyelid.

When he entered, the undertaker, with the practiced touch of his profession, had felt the body and had failed to feel Conastilla's heart beating. Previously, Conastilla had been reported dead and the necessary burial blanks had been filled out. Furthermore, it was known that Conastilla had been ill for more than a week and that in delirium attending his illness he had walked out of the house and had fallen twenty feet. Those who picked him up believed his neck was broken.

Under all these circumstances, Conastilla had every reason to be dead. He is still unable to discuss the matter, but seems to be very glad that he is in his bed, and not in the morgue or the cemetery. It is now thought that he will recover. When he fell, he landed on the back of his neck and it is supposed the jolt to his brain and spinal column put him in a state of coma.

Carries Mail in Three States.

Hamburg, Iowa, has a rural mail carrier who enjoys a unique distinction. Every day he drives into three States, Iowa, Missouri, and Nebraska. Hamburg is very close to the Missouri line and there is an island in the Missouri River, well populated, that belongs to Nemaha County, Nebraska.

Homing Bird Flight.

What is thought to be a world's record for a 300-mile, young-bird flight was made in a contest promoted by the American Eagle Homing Club, of the Hampden district. The Imperial Loft bird homed at the rate of 1,748.44 yards per minute. Ideal conditions aided the birds. Some of the owners were taken unawares, for it was calculated that the birds would not reach their coops for hours after the first batch landed in Baltimore.

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